Wild One (Are You Hungry?)

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Wild One (Are You Hungry?)

by Kodak17

Summary

Will had spent the past few years of his life in isolation, live alone, work alone, hunt alone. That all changes when a chance encounter drives him into the path of someone who not only understands his hunger but is more than willing to feed it.

Notes

This is an extreme 180 from what I normally write but I am stressed and ✨hyperfixating✨. Enjoy some murder, rating may change as I keep writing.

Chapter 1

It was just past six am when the forensic team made it to the crime scene. They hiked through a mile of dense forest to get to it and the sweat under Will's collar cooled into a freezing line along his neck.

He got the call at two, parts of a woman found somewhere near Woodbridge by a hiker or a hunter or a drunk. Jack picked him up and thrust a coffee and a case file in his hands and now here they were. Will stood at the edge for a moment watching people swarm at the carnage laid out among skeletal trees. Eventually Jack grew impatient and dragged him over.

There wasn't much left, pale waxen skin interspersed with a dark red ooze, mostly dried, what was left of her face was crusted in morning frost and the ice clung to her eyelashes and the folds of her torn cheeks. It was beautiful, raw, a true form.

"An animal attack?" Will asked, Jack shook his head, shrugged then shook his head again.

"We're at least eight miles from any form of civilization, no car found yet, and clothing remains show she was in heels and a suit, she got out here somehow."

Will frowned, "seems pretty… animalistic for a human." He rubbed his arms against the chill.

Jack drained his coffee and made an impatient sound in his throat.

"That's why you're here."

He winced when Jack called for space, his voice ringing like a bellow in the morning air, the forensic team slunk back, annoyed but unwilling to toe the line. Will took his place, crouching beside the corpse and staring at the red-white meld of her eviscerated frame. He could smell the coppery tang of her blood and the loamy rot of the dirt around her. He closed his eyes, breathed deep and *remembered* .

The feeling was still vivid and rich in his mind, the night air sharp and fresh, waiting patiently, silently until a crack, a sharp breath and then the hunt. She'd been a jogger, a marathoner, lean and quick like a jack rabbit. The hunt was good, rich in his lungs as he goaded and corralled until she was forced down a ravine. He had heard the meaty snap of her ankle, the anguished cry of a downed animal.

She had tried, feisty and alive but he was faster, better. The snap of her neck felt rich on his tongue, she tasted like pennies and life and flesh, thick and rich and oh so satisfying. He cracked his eyes open fighting the urge to stoke the remains of her dark hair, that was weird even for him.

He shook himself out, like coming out of a fog, plastered a pained upset on his face and turned around.

“So?” Jack prompted, eager and unsettled. Will looked back at her, a scrap of white clung to her arm, the remains of her shirt that had torn like spider silk in his hands.

“There’s not a lot here to go on, the damage looks like it was done by an animal, if we find out how she died it might tell me more.”

“That’s it? How the hell did she get out here then?” he shouted, Will cringed at the noise and shrugged.

“She could be a drug addict, got high and got lost, not finding a car doesn’t mean there isn’t one.”

Jack frowned, looking over his face like he was withholding the answers he wanted, finally he shook his head and stomped off to yell at someone else. Will looked back at the body once more.

“Pretty brutal,” Beverly stopped beside him, looking over his shoulder at the body, “blood flow says she was still alive when she was ripped apart.”

“Brutal” he echoed.

“Cause of death is gonna be tough seeing as we’re missing half her body and this half is pretty much ground beef. Her neck was broken, didn't kill her though.”

Will nodded along, not really listening. Eventually Beverly caught on to his distraction and wandered off.

The day dragged, forensics poked and prodded, the body was bagged, it was a pitiful bundle, only a partial torso and head. Nothing else was found, (nothing would ever be found).

Usually *nothing* was found, Will was meticulous with his kills, leaving nothing behind, something had been wrong with this one, something in her bloodstream that made him hazy and confused. Instead of breaking down whatever he didn’t eat and discarding it he had wandered off, slept, awoken to daylight and had to run off before someone saw him.

By the time Will made it back to Wolf Trap it was past dinner time. The dogs jumped at the door but a low sound of warning had them all backing off. He let them run out into the yard, watching as they sniffed around and eventually all ran back to greet him and beg for supper.

He poured himself a glass of cheap scotch and dished out bowls of dog kibble, each bowl topped with a few scraps of meat (a good leader shares their hunt with their pack). A look at his barren fridge showed he’d need to shop if he wanted real food so he topped up his drink and went back out onto the porch.

The labs smelled like formaldehyde and old blood, it seeped into his clothes and skin, clinging to him even when he left. It was particularly strong that day, the remains of Will’s hunt laid out on one of the metal tables. He gave it a sidelong glance before shuffling over to where Beverly and Zeller are huddled around a computer.

“Any luck?” he asked. Zeller snorted.

“Plenty, nothing overly enlightening, her jaw was ripped apart so dental is only half helpful and can’t get fingerprints because her arms are gone. All the damage was done by some form of canine or bear and there are no signs of foul play other than a broken ankle and neck.”

Will surveys the body, bloodless, cold, *gross*.

“Dogs will shake things that they catch to try and break their necks, or I mean if she was intoxicated and fell…”

Beverly slid up beside him. “Toxicology came back and she had a pretty solid hit of OxyContin in her system.”

Fuck, no wonder he’d been so out of it, his fault for not checking her bag before eating her. The meds had given her blood a chalky aftertaste. Probably why he left half of her to be found.

Price came in and set a tray of coffee and a file on the table. He gave Will a smirk and nodded at the body, “our running theory is she was probably in a car with someone on the highway, got mad and decided to walk, wouldn’t be surprised if she was high and wandered off into the woods.”

“And wolves or wild dogs got her.” Will concluded, Price nodded, “Jack’s gonna hate that.”

“He should be happy it’s not another killer, or a werewolf.” Zeller scoffed, Will fought down a smile and picked up the file.

“Have we got an ID?”

“We ran the partial dentals, got a few possible matches but going off what we have for a face I’d say it’s Samantha Carmicheal, auction house secretary from Baltimore.” Beverly handed him a photo and he studied the familiar face. She was pretty, mid forties, blonde and primped, Will had found her in an upscale bar in Baltimore. They hadn’t talked, he wasn’t that stupid, but he had sat near her and listened to her babble about her infidelity and embezzlement, a entitled hedge fund baby, he knew she would be a satisfying hunt.

He shook off the thought of her panicked breathing and muddled fear before he could get too distracted and handed the picture back.

“So case closed?” he hedged, Price frowned.

“Knowing Jack probably not, but you can take this to him and see what he says hmm?” He grinned as he shoved a second case file and the photo back into Will’s hands. Will huffed but acquiesced, the sooner he could go home and all.

Apparently the case was not closed, Jack was unconvinced that a well off woman would just end up in the woods so he sent an officer to talk to her husband and Will to talk to her

psychiatrist. Now here he was standing in the waiting room of one Dr. Hannibal Lecter, he'd called ahead and had been met by a deep, accented voice telling him to arrive at 4 o'clock sharp.

It was now 4:09 and Will was trying extremely hard to not be annoyed, these rich types always rubbed him wrong, no consequences in their silver spoon world made them snooty and rude. He was considering just leaving to spite everyone when the door behind him swung open and a man stepped out.

Will had expected some seventy year old man in a tweed suit, pompous and unkind. A quick glance down told him the tweed was right, sort of, but the man before him was sharp and strong, maybe forty with slick hair and a suit that was both ridiculous and visibly expensive. He gave Will a tight lipped smile as he gestured him into his office.

"Detective please come in, I apologize for the wait my last patient took a bit of extra time."

Will waved him off awkwardly, he was thrown off, both by the man's appearance and the distinct twist of instincts he felt the moment they made eye contact. Something was *wrong* about this man, he smelled like death, not bad, but cold, deep and rich, like rot and blood and all Will's favourite parts of a hunt. He fought off the distraction and forced himself to look back at the man.

"It's fine, and I'm not a detective, just Will is fine." Lecter smiled again.

"Very well then, now what was it you needed to discuss?" Will pulled the file from his bag.

"I needed to talk about one of your patients, Samantha Carmicheal."

Dr. Lecter gave him another smile, this one bordering on patronizing, "Unfortunately I cannot discuss her without a warrant or her permission."

"Gonna be difficult to get the latter seeing as she's dead." His smile dropped.

"I see, well that may change things then."

Dr. Lecter ushered him over to a pair of chairs positioned in front of an empty fireplace. He offered Will a drink which he declined before settling across from him.

"So if you're investigating there is foul play?" he asked. Will stared at the array of books lining the wall.

"It's possible, unlikely though, there was proof that she may have had a drug problem."

Dr. Lecter's face was smooth, unaffected, Will couldn't tell if he was surprised by the news.

"May I ask what she was taking?"

"OxyContin."

Dr. Lecter hummed, the sound sent a shiver down Will's spine and he tried not to frown at his own reaction.

"I was aware she had a prescribed painkiller for an old injury, I hadn't noticed an addiction." Will nodded, writing it down as annoyance swelled at the reminder of his slip up.

"Any problems with people?" That got him a slight shrug.

"Some tensions with her husband, I believe she was unfaithful but Mrs.Carmichael made no obvious statement on the fact."

"Why do you think she was cheating?"

Dr. Lecter crossed his legs with pursed lips, disapproving of her actions, or of Will asking, "Mrs. Carmichael has grown bored in her life, spoke often of seeking new thrills, she occasionally spoke of a younger man whom she worked with, it's only speculation but I would be unsurprised if she'd found herself a younger lover."
"Huh, so maybe cheating, no problems with work? Besides possibly sleeping with her coworker."

"Not that I was aware of."

Will bit his lip as he scribbled down the answers then shoved the file and notebook back in his bag. Dr. Lecter gave him an appraising look.

"That's all? I'd think the FBI would be much more thorough in their investigations."

Will shrugged, "Her death was clearly not foul play, rather foolhardy, I believe talking to you was Agent Crawfords punishment for me."

That got Will a smile, something much more predatory than he was used to seeing on humans, the death smell was stronger.

"A punishment? Surely my reputation doesn't precede me so harshly."

"Most social interactions are unpleasant."

"You must keep unpleasant company."

"Well death brings in strange characters."

Dr. Lecter didn't respond to that, rather he leaned back in his chair, languid like a cat in the sun.

"Will you tell me how she died?"

"It's not pleasant."

"Death rarely is."

Will huffed, the snap of her ankle echoed in his mind, “the running theory is she was either driving or in a car with someone, she got out for whatever reason and wandered into the woods while intoxicated. She got lost, injured and was attacked by an animal.”

“She was eaten?” Will searched his face but it was blank, smooth and emotionless. He shrugged, telling people about deaths really wasn’t his forte.

“Yes, most likely.”

“A tragedy, I do hope she was long gone before she was consumed.”

“Oh, yea she was,” *lie.* The sound she’d made when he tore into her still made him shiver with hunger.

“Have you spoken to her husband?”

“Someone else is, I’ve got terrible bedside manners apparently,” that earns him a smile, it was sharp, dangerous.

“Few people can master the art of telling someone their loved one is dead, it is not a skill to be envious of.”

“Have you had to?”

“More than once, both as a psychiatrist and a surgeon.”

“You’re a surgeon?”

“Was. It's been many years.”

Will hummed, scrubbed his hands over his jeans and stood up.

“Huh, well thank you for cooperating, I’ll get out of your hair”

“It’s my pleasure, I do hope you are able to find out what happened to her.”

Will gave him an awkward smile and pulled his coat back on. Lecter stood beside him patiently and Will couldn’t help but take a deeper breath of the *death rot copper* smell that clung to him. He wanted a taste, to rip into his throat and see what his blood tasted like. The thought was abandoned with great effort, he was too close to the last hunt, too soon, his slip up meant he’d have to wait, be cautious, he hated being cautious.

He drove straight back to Wolftrap, Jack would be pissed but the smell of death was thick in his nose and he wanted to run, wanted to *hunt,* he’d take his pack out and pray the feeling would fade.

Will waited in apprehension for Samantha Carmicheals case to be closed, her husband and coworkers were interviewed, questions asked. She’d gone out for drinks the night she went

missing before telling her friends she was going to meet a secret someone.

That secret someone was in fact her coworker who once confronted admitted she'd never arrived, her car was found at a rest stop over ten miles from where her body was found, undisturbed. An unfortunate accident, a tragedy as Dr. Lecter had said.

Any lingering hesitancy to close the case was swiftly overcome when they got the call about a body in an empty swimming pool. The pool had been closed for the winter, a gaping maw of concrete and blue tile. Will lowered himself down the ladder and winced at the smell of rotting blood and chlorine. It had been a few weeks since his last hunt and his skin felt too tight across his bones, like he'd been stuffed into a suit two sizes too small.

Jack was barking orders, the noise echoed around the pool creating a reverb that grated on his nerves. He shoved his glasses on his face and forced himself to focus.

It was a woman, she laid on her back in the deep end surrounded by a slowly drying pool of blood. The body was skinned, only her eyelids and ears left. She was bound in gold thread, twisting around her ankles and wrists and wrapping in waves up her torso and legs. Up close the smell of copper and meat were intense. He took a step back on instinct, his mind telling him this meat was bad, not fresh, he shook himself out and approached.

"Will!" he winced at the noise, Jack approached him, "Body was found by some kids this morning, forced entry, I need to know if this is the Ripper."

"Were there any trophies taken?"

"Skin's missing, body's intact besides a severed spine. It's got him written all over it though."

Will hummed, unconvinced, it wasn't really a tableau, no showmanship, this felt more like death rights than an art piece.

He crouched beside the body, glancing over the lines of muscle and thread before closing his eyes and letting the pendulum swing.

An arena, a colosseum, the grounds for my victory.

A gift, meticulous, I learned from the last ones, a clean kill, the beast needs not suffer.

I skin it carefully, leave the hide intact, I bind the beast in gold to trap the spirit.

A gift, an offering, not enough yet, but better.

This is my design.

The visions faded back into the present, the smell and sound throwing itself back in his face. He blew out a breath and stood up. Jack was there and attempting to be patient.

“Is it the Ripper?”

“No, no this is someone else, this isn’t his first kill, but it’s his first public one, she was killed and skinned here.”

“Why the thread”

“He’s- she isn’t a person to him but a beast, something mythological, the gold thread is meant to contain her, like a superstition.”

“So he’s crazy, he’s in love with her-” Will shook his head.

“No it’s not about her, she was a conquer, her skin is the trophy, a gift for the real prize.”

Jack nodded, frowning, “so we’re looking for more people who have been skinned, people he practiced on.”

Frustration bubbled, Will fought it down, “maybe, it’s hard to tell, he’s killed but the skinning isn’t necessary to his pathology.”
“What is then?”

The sun was making the smell worse, Will’s head ached. “I don’t know, I need to see the previous kills, but he took the skin, would still have it, do we know how it was removed?”

“With a knife,” Price called from behind them, “sharp but not a scalpel, he was careful but unpracticed, like he read a manual on skinning deer and tried to replicate it.”

“So we have nothing.” Jack asked, demanded, Price shrugged and Will went back to staring at the body.

Jack stood for a moment longer before retreating out of the pool, Will followed him desperate to escape the smell.

He sat on a bleacher watching as the scene was cataloged, he needed a hunt, to eat, maybe tomorrow night he’d go searching. The focus would be on this new killer, he’d have some grace in covering his tracks. The thought gave him enough energy to finish at the pool without throwing up or punching someone.

The thread had been coated in honey, the smell heady and cloying in the lab now that Will was free from the chlorine haze of the pool. They’d catalogued the patterns before carefully unwrapping the body like a gruesome present.

The thread itself was expensive, real gold, it was sent off to find where it came from. The smell of copper and honey made Will’s teeth ache with hunger but he forced himself to focus

and he searched through cases in the last two months that could have been the same killer, nothing came up.

Dental records led them to a bottle girl from Baltimore, she was pretty, young, Will felt a ghost of empathy for her but moved on quickly.

By the time they had compiled everything they could it was well past midnight and Will was stretched thin and exhausted. The drive home was long and he barely managed to feed his dogs before he collapsed into his bed to sleep, his bones ached with hunger, he would go the next night, find someone. The thought sent a thrill down his spine and the taste of blood followed him into his dreams.

The bar he chose was dark, smoked filled and drab, crushed velvet chairs that were tearing at the seams, the bar was sticky and the bathroom stickier. It was a lot on his senses but he knew to vary where he found his prey, avoid any connections being made between victims.

He bought a cheap whiskey and sat at the bar, he let his senses unfold and worm under the thump of the music and the cloud of old smoke. Voices and scents, he sifted through them, tasting, listening. He never really had a preference, he'd know in the moment, he paused a few times cataloguing conversations and scents before moving on.

The glass in his hand grew tepid by the time his mind caught on something of interest, a new figure sauntered into the bar, late twenties, expensive sweater but a cheap cologne. He was clean cut, over primped and cocky, he smelled like liquor and arousal as he surveyed the bar, eyes catching on waitresses and college girls. Will watched from the sidelines as the man bought a drink before slinking over to a group of girls, he listened as he postured and flirted, he was grating and obnoxious, he was *perfect.*

The night was young and Will was patient, he bought another drink and waited.

It took another two hours for his prey to leave the bar, he'd flitted between groups of women, trying and failing to score someone.

After one too many rejections he stumbled out of the bar, frustrated and drunk, Will tracked him down the road, keeping to the shadows and avoiding any street cameras. Eventually the man steered into an alley to relieve himself, Will graciously waited for him to finish before striking out. He crumbled like a paper doll, pathetic on the concrete. Will shoved him behind a dumpster and went to get his car.

The drive to his hunting ground was quiet, his prey bound in the trunk. The thrum under his skin felt like electricity, he yearned to stretch, to run.

By the time he pulled off onto the logging road his heart was hammering in his chest at the anticipation. He forced himself to focus, another mistake would be bad at this stage, so close to the last kill another body wouldn't be dismissed.

The car stayed on the gravel to avoid tire treads, he stripped off his jacket and outer shirt, his shoes, socks and belt. He pulled the still unconscious man from the trunk, free of the city his scent was more clear and Will fought the urge to just tear into him.

His coat and jewelry, anything that could get lost in the chase, were removed and left in the trunk, his phone had already been left in a gutter by the bar, his wallet Will would deal with later. The man was a dead weight as he lifted him, he secured him across his shoulders before picking up his bag. Then he carried him into the woods. He had maybe thirty minutes before he awoke, lots of time to get far from the road.

Will felt clear for the first time in days as he trudged barefoot through the woods, his eyes shifted to see in the darkness and his senses expanded till he could hear every mouse and beetle, the stream ten miles out and the highway ten back.

When he was satisfied with their location he dumped his burden, the man wheezed when he hit the ground, his eyes fluttering. Will left him to wake up and slunk away.

He stripped out of his clothes, folded them and tucked them in his bag before shoving it into a bush. The thrill under his skin reached a crescendo as he felt the shift ripple across him, he breathed into the pain as his bones cracked and shifted, the world warped and darkened before zooming into hyper focus.

In this form his senses were a cacophony, he could hear every shift and shudder of the forest. The sound of his prey awakening was a siren wail in comparison. The man cursed and groaned, shifting around sluggishly as he gathered his surroundings.

Will waited patiently until he was on his feet and semi aware before he began to circle. The man froze when he heard the snapping of branches, he called out, false bravado underpinned by the smell of fear permeating under his cologne. Will waited, so patient, till the fear had grown sharper, frantic, before he showed himself.

This was always the best part, the realization, whaled eyed disbelief sharpening into pure terror. He rumbled low in his throat and stepped forward, the man bolted with a strangled cry.

The hunt began.

Chapter 2

Will's hunch about the swimming pool murder being related to some mythology hit a bump when he couldn't find anything to do with gold threads coated in honey, he searched through superstitions, folklore, historic burial traditions and couldn't find anything closely related enough to be relevant. Still he knew it was right in some way and was persistent enough that Jack was on his side.

They tracked down a historian with a focus on mythology a few states over who agreed to travel to Baltimore to meet with them. Apparently he insisted the meeting take place at some antiquity gala in an opera house so he wouldn't be "wasting a trip".

Will tried to beg out of the meeting but seeing as it was his hunch Jack was less than accommodating. Beverly refused to attend with him, Jack was magically otherwise engaged and he would not stoop to asking Price or Zeller which left him with the horrifying concept of going alone.

Rubbing elbows with that many elite pompous socialites was not his idea of a pleasant evening, the idea of going alone and not being allowed to offset it with a hunt made his skin crawl with anxiety. The thought had him slinking into Alana's office with a coffee in hopes of bribing her into attending.

It was unneeded, she had given him a bright smile when he asked and a chiding smack when she realized he'd been trying to bribe her. Apparently she knew some of the people that were to be attending and was more than happy to accompany him.

That Saturday found Will standing on the steps of the Baltimore Opera House itchy and uncomfortable while he waited for Alana to arrive. He'd rented a tuxedo, paid for by the FBI, it smelled like a hundred other people's cologne and he wanted to shred it the second he put it on. He hadn't offered to pick Alana up, that was probably rude of him but the idea of sitting in a car with her for thirty minutes was more than he wanted to deal with. She was kind to him, but in a patronizing and vaguely institutional way.

He knew how he came across, twitchy and rude, he knew Jack and Alana knew about his past in Louisiana and she seemed to see him as a kicked dog, traumatized and edgy. Their interactions were always pleasant but they left Will feeling off kilter, like a mongrel sniffing for scraps so he avoided when he could.

There were a few people milling around outside the opera house, the night was crisp and felt good compared to the stuffy ballroom he knew he'd have to endure.

A cab pulled up, Alana stepped out, immediately spotting Will and giving him a soft smile. Her dress was green, it made her look elegant, refined compared to Will's frumpy suit and twitchy nature. She gave him a hug, awkward and too loose and they made their way inside.

The ballroom was cavernous and packed, there was a stage at the far end, set for the auction that started in two hours, people dressed in designer suits and dresses milled around, clumped

in groups like preening birds. Will stepped closer to Alana as they entered the room and fought the urge to just flee, it was loud, so much, almost too much.

They skirted the room, scanning for their historian, a few people gave Will judging looks and he thought how inappropriate it would be to just bite someone. Thankfully they found their man fairly quickly and went to introduce themselves.

Professor Stanton was a very strange man, he was short, only reaching Will's chin, and had a shock of grey hair sprouting from his head like a bird's down.

He'd shaken their hands enthusiastically while talking about some ancient text available at the auction he wanted very badly. Will tried to be polite but left most of the talking to Alana, eventually he talked himself out and finally focused on the reason they were all there.

"Now you need my help with something, yes? A case, the man on the phone said, he was a strange fellow, very dour." Will fought down a smile at the professor's very apt imitation of Jack's grumbling and pulled out a piece of paper. Alana shot him a look, probably assuming it was a crime scene photo but he just shook his head and unfolded it.

"We're investigating something that might be related to some mythology or superstition. Do you know of anything that involves binding a person or creature in gold thread coated in honey? A configuration like this." He handed the historian the paper.

He was going to bring a crime scene photo, Beverly told him that was insane and sketched the body and the binding for him. Professor Stanton took the paper with a frown.

"Gold thread and honey, very strange…" he muttered to himself for a few moments and Will looked at Alana, apparently he did a poor job of hiding his impatience because she gave him a pitying smile and patted his arm. Eventually Stanton turned back to them but his face was twisted in a frown.

"I can't think of anything specific that could help you, silver and iron are common in binding many different creatures, gold is usually related to marriage or health. Bee's have many stories behind them, honey again can be for healing, I haven't heard of the two together." He seemed genuinely distressed that he didn't know and Alana jumped in to reassure him it was alright. Will was annoyed but unsurprised, he may have been wrong, misdirected, it happened.

Will left Alana to her comforting to go find a drink he sorely needed. There was a bar in the middle of the room where Will bought himself an extremely overpriced glass of scotch and considered buying Alana something but decided it might be construed weird. He took a sip and turned to watch the room.

There were more people now, packed in like overpriced sardines as they all laughed and simpered and did whatever annoyingly rich people did on a Saturday night. Will could see a few people giving him side glances, he stood out in his rented suit and scruffy face, he smiled nasty at one man that stared to long and tried to figure out how to leave early. The familiar smell of *death rot copper* preceded a deep voice from Will's left.

“This doesn’t seem like a place you would frequent, Agent Graham.”

He turned to see Dr. Lecter and what appeared to be an entire entourage behind him. He was opulent in his velvet tuxedo and probably real ruby cufflinks, Will fought the feeling of inferiority and nodded to him.

“Dr. Lecter.” The man smiled.

“Is this another one of Agent Crawfords punishments?” His smile was secretive, Will felt himself blush and hid it in his glass.

“This one is unfortunately self imposed.”
“I see, work related?” Will nodded, “the same case?” he shook his head. Dr. Lecter’s entourage were watching them like a tennis match until one woman stepped forward.

“Who is this dear creature Hannibal? Are you in antiquity?” She asked in the same tone one would ask about a child's favourite colour, Will bristled but fought it down, Dr. Lecter answered for him.

“Agent Graham works with the FBI.” He turned to his followers, seamlessly including Will into the circle, the group looked at him with a mix of jealousy and curiosity.

“Must see some strange things eh?” an older man joked, bumping Will’s shoulder, he imagined what sound he would make when Will ripped his heart out.

“Sometimes,” he murmured, “if you excuse me I’m sure my colleague is looking for me, Dr. Lecter, others…” he gave an awkward nod and excused himself.

Professor Stanton was gone when he made it back to Alana, she had somehow acquired champagne and was chatting with a group of people. Will steered away from her, burnt out and unwilling to socialize anymore. He found a good corner and slouched into the wall, he shot a text off to Bev that the historian was a bust and stared into his drink for a bit.

The gentle tap of shoes on tile approached him and he looked up, ready to straight up scare whoever it was away when he came eye to eye with Dr. Lecter again. He glanced past him quickly, looking for his trail of admirers but found him alone, the man gave him a crooked smile.

“I apologize for bombarding you before, I was surprised to see you.”

Will shrugged, “Understandable, I’d apologize for running away but I don’t feel overly sorry.”

Dr. Lecter smiled, the glint in his eye was dangerous, exciting, the scent of him broke through the haze perfume and shoe polish and Will fought the urge to move closer.

“One shouldn't apologize if they don’t feel remorse, now what brings you to the opera tonight?”

“Like I said, work, needed to discuss some things with a professor who was here tonight.”

“What could the FBI need with a historian, especially one as eclectic as Professor Stanton.”

Will glared at him, obviously he’s seen them talking, he didn’t like the idea that he hadn't noticed the man, usually Will was aware of everyone that was around him.

“That’s classified unfortunately,” he finished his drink frowning at the empty glass, Dr. Lecter plucked it from his fingers.

“Perhaps I could buy you another drink then? I’m sure we could find something other than murder to speak about.”

Will stared at him for a moment, he wanted to, but he was more interested in getting out of this suit and sitting in the woods until his nose cleared.

“Raincheck perhaps?” Dr. Lecter said before he could decline, obviously seeing the discomfort on his face. “I could have you for dinner next week at my home.”

Will stared at him for a moment trying to parse his intentions, his face was as infallible as ever.

“I‘m not very good company Dr. Lecter, hunting murderers tends to make me unpleasant.”

“Well then a night away would do you good, yes?”

Dr. Lecter gave him another sharp smile and handed him a business card and a coy demand for Will to contact him. He slipped away into the crowd and Will decided he was done with his night, he found Alana easily enough and wished her a good night before escaping the opera house and trying not to run to his car.

The drive back to Wolf Trap was quiet, the business card in his pocket a heavy weight on his mind, he tried to pretend he could still smell the *death rot copper* on the paper.

The business card sat on his coffee table for two days, the paper was luxurious and embossed, he’d run his fingers over the words a million times trying to get up the nerve to send a message. He’d never really pursued anyone, not since he left Louisiana, he knew he wouldn’t be able to hide himself and have a proper relationship, even a proper fuck. It had been fine, he had his pack, he hunted, had sort of friends… colleagues.

Dr. Lecter, Hannibal the card said, he was new, different, interesting, Will wasn’t sure if it was just the urge to hunt him down and feel his blood spilled on his tongue or something else but he tried not to think about it too hard.

It had only been a week since his last hunt, it had been a good one, the man was fit and fast, had made it almost two miles before Will caught him. Despite the linger of alcohol in his system he’d been delicious, red meat and iron.

Will had eaten his fill before collecting the rest of the meat in bags and burying the bones along the walk back to his car. He’d shredded the contents of his wallet and thrown them in a

dumpster on the edge of the city. After such a good hunt he felt clearer, stronger, he'd last a while before he'd need another.

It was late on Monday, he'd spent part of the day at Quantico helping Price and Beverly flip through cases looking for the previous victims of their killer before returning home to feed and walk his dogs, they were all settled around where he sat on the couch snoring and snuffling as he stared at the business card.

He could do this, worse case it was terrible and he left, he couldn't hunt Dr. Lecter, he was too close to him now so he wouldn't be losing much if the evening went sour. The paper was in his hand now, his thumb tracing the word *Hannibal* over and over, finally he cursed and pulled out his phone, he typed out a message, erased it, typed a new one, erased half then the whole thing. He threw his phone down with a groan and glared at the wall for a moment, finally he picked it up again and typed out a simple message, *this is Will Graham, I'm free wednesday and friday night if you still want to meet.* He hit send before he could change his mind and threw the phone down again. When no answer came through immediately he went upstairs to shower and change for bed.

When he returned there was a new message on his screen and he cursed himself for the flutter he felt.

Hello Will, I am available after 7 on Wednesday, I will see you then

The text that followed was an address and Will huffed out a breath and threw himself sideways on the couch. It would be fine, good even, he needed to socialize more. Dating was off the table, he would give himself away at some point.

He'd tried, back in Louisiana, it was six months after the thing he had categorized as "the incident" and he was trying to get his life back. He was still getting used to his instincts and sense of smell and the million other changes that had cropped up since that night in the woods.

The force had given him an honourable discharge for injury and emotional damage or something and he had been unsure where to go from there. He had yet to have his first hunt, only a thrumming under his skin he didn't yet know how to remedy and a desire that danced in his dreams. The woman he met had been sweet, gentle, she was from out of town, flirting with him while he fixed his car, she smelled like sweat and synthetic cherry.

He took her out for burgers that night, she'd touched his arm and then his thigh, he felt a hunger in his bones and slid closer, breathing in the smell that he later identified as a nervous arousal on her skin. When she slid a daring hand up to his zipper and bit her lip he had taken her home.

They hadn't made it to his bed, rather they sprawled on the kitchen floor as she rode him, the smells and sounds had overwhelmed him. Her eyes were clenched shut as she moaned low in her throat, Will felt a pressure in his chest, so engrossed he didn't see the danger until it was too late. She leaned down, bracing her hands on either side of his head, she tilted her chin up, maybe an invitation, it didn't matter. Will struck out, unnaturally sharp teeth latched onto her

throat and bit down, she stuttered, froze, a tiny sound eked out of her throat before Will twisted and ripped his mouthful free.

He changed for the first time that night, right there on his kitchen floor, he didn't remember much at all, woke up the next morning in his own skin again, nothing more than a pile of bones and clothes left in the kitchen. The sight was less traumatizing than he was expecting, he'd never been overly set in his morals and this seemed like something he'd have to either work with or let destroy him.

He left Louisiana soon after, wanting a fresh start, took up a teaching job and settled into the woods. The instincts grew stronger, stabilized, he learned to use them, to control his change, he became a monster. It was good, but lonely, he knew he had no other choice.

As much as he liked the idea of Dr. Lecter and whatever danger lurked under his skin, he knew it would be much harder to get away with ripping his throat out in bed. Still, dinner would be nice, being in Dr. Lecter's house where his smell had etched into every surface and having his undivided attention, a nice substitute if he couldn't have the full meal.

A new body popped up barely two weeks after the swimming pool murder, it had been found in a dank motel room by the cleaning lady and Will got the call just after dinner. The scene was already overrun when he made it there and Jack immediately dragged him into the room.

"I need to know if it's the same killer." He demanded, all but shoving Will towards the body on the bed. It was a man this time, laid on his back, it was notably cleaner than the last scene but he still had all his skin so that probably helped. Will moved closer and caught the scent of honey and the cloying perfume of roses, up close he could see the mouth was open and all his teeth removed, the cavity had been filled with rose petals and honey, the sticky substance spilling over the sides and pooling in his hair. He stepped back and closed his eyes, focused.

Give and take, this one shall return, a gift so it is fair, even

A private place it may recover, a swift death

My gift is nearly ready, nearly perfect

She will see me

Will opened his eyes, this one was disorienting, the killer had a whole world of his own and cracking it felt like sticking his head in a beehive. He scrubbed a hand over his face and turned to Jack.

"It's the same killer, he's delusional, believes these aren't people, he took the teeth for the same reason he took the skin, he's gathering gifts, offerings, for someone."

"And the roses are what?"

"An exchange, whatever he thinks this man was, he believes he'll come back to life, the roses are a trade for his teeth."

“Jesus christ,” Jack stared at the wall for a moment before frowning, “so he’s insane and on some mythical quest.”

“Apparently.”

“I need more than that, something to catch him.”

Will sighed, “he’s getting the mythos from somewhere, or he wrote it himself and that's no help, the kills from before the pool might give us more, he may have been sloppier, started closer to home.”

“Keep looking then,” Jack ordered, Will nodded and left the room.

Once again Will found himself knee deep in case files, trying fruitlessly to find other kills connected to this one. Nothing was fitting, another search for mythos, this time teeth and roses and honey, again nothing. They gave up after midnight and Beverly convinced him to join them for a drink.

They crushed themselves into a booth in a smoky pub and ordered a round of beers.

“So you honestly think this guy believes he’s on some kind of quest?” Zeller asked, Will frowned at him but tried not to be offended, it was a weird case.

“It seems like it, the rituals around the deaths seem random unless you look at them like each ‘thing’ he kills has its own ceremony to observe, the pool kill needed to be bound, the motel would return so a gift was left.”

“But you haven’t found anything it could match, do you think he’s just making it up? A complicated delusion.”

“It’s possible, it’s-” he grimaced and took a drink, this killer made his mind ache like a fever, phantom heat and delirium. “He’s definitely delusional to some degree, the question is whether he got the delusion from somewhere or if it’s all in his head.”

“This job never gets dull and it never gets more fun,” Beverly griped, “I should have listened to my mother and been a highschool teacher.”

Price snorted into his drink, “you would have killed one of your students on the first day,” she shrugged but didn’t disagree.

Will leaned back in his chair and listened as they bickered, just for fun he let his senses stretch and poked around the pub. The couple behind him were going to leave each other soon, going by the second perfume he could smell on the man and the snide way they spoke to each other. The bartender was high, the smell of weed clung to his clothes and his speech was slow.

Nothing overly interesting, clips of conversation, shifts in scents, little clues that opened their lives like books, Will could see it all if he wanted, usually he didn’t. A group of men came in, rowdy and overbearing, he snapped his senses in tight before the scent of Axe and body odor

could overwhelm him, he refocused just in time for Beverly to focus in on him with a salacious grin.

“So, Will, I heard from Alana that you made a very suave friend at the gala?” She leaned over the table, Price and Zeller turned to him as he felt his ears redden against his will.

“I… what?” he asked, knowing what she was getting at but hoping desperately to avoid.

“Dr. Lecter, she saw you together, apparently he used to mentor her, she saw you all tucked away behind a plant having a very *private* chat.” She said it like a dirty secret and Price crowed in laughter.

“Look at you Graham, getting yourself a sugar daddy.”

“I’m not-ugh, we were just talking, I interviewed him about the Samantha Carmicheal case.”

“Talking, flirting in a dark corner, same difference.” Beverly grinned at him and Will decided he would not tell her about the dinner.

“We were not flirting, he was asking me about the case.”

“Uh huh”

“I don’t know why I tolerate you.”

She threw a handful of peanuts at him.

The case kept him busy enough he barely had time to stress about Wednesday before it was upon him, he left work early to go back to Wolf Trap and change. Dr. Lecter had said casual but it wasn’t like Will had any other choice unless he wanted to rent another suit. He picked his cleanest jeans and a green sweater and even used some duct tape to get the dog hair off it.

The drive back to Baltimore was nerve-wracking, he hadn’t done anything like this in years, drinks with Alana or Beverly and his nights looking for hunts barely counted. He couldn’t help the flashes of synthetic cherry and blood on his teeth and it made him both nervous and hard and it was not what he needed right now.

The address he was given was to a massive house in the rich section of Baltimore, unsurprising but he felt out of place in his rusting pick up truck as he parked along the road and walked up the driveway.

He’d brought a bottle of wine, he went to a nice looking shop near Quantico and asked for a recommendation for under seventy dollars and prayed it was okay. The bottle had a wax cap and a picture of a swan that felt just pretentious enough to not seem like an insult to Dr. Lecter’s ostentatious palette.

The nerves under his skin crescendoed as he knocked on the door and he fought down the urge to just run as he watched a shadow pass over the glass paneling and the knob turn. Dr.

Lecter was dressed down from the last two times Will had seen him, he was in grey dress pants and a pale shirt with his sleeves rolled up to his elbows, there was an apron around his waist and Will was annoyed at how handsome he looked.

“Will, right on time, come in please.”

He stepped into the house and fought the urge to take a deep inhale of the delicious battery of smells that reached him. The expected *death rot hunt* mixed with a delicious aroma of cooking meat and fresh herbs.

“Dr. Lecter-”

“Hannibal, please.”

“Hannibal, I uh here.” He thrust the wine at him. “I hope it's good, I apparently have a terrible palette so I left the choice up to someone else.”

Hannibal smiled at him, “I’m sure it will be perfect, come, I am just plating our appetizer.”

He took Will’s coat before directing him into the kitchen and pouring both of them a glass of wine, he returned to piping something pink into small dishes and Will took a sip of his wine.

“Did you work today?” he asked after a moment of silence, Hannibal nodded.

“I had clients for most of the afternoon, nothing of note, and you? Still hunting murders I presume.”

Will huffed, “Today was mostly classes but yes, we have quite the case right now.”

“Ah yes ‘The Collector’, I saw the article.”

Right, fucking Lounds, she’d been kept from the scenes but got some starry eyed beat cop to talk and the article had popped up the next morning.

“Yea, that one, it’s been something.”

“Do you wish to speak about it?”

“Do you? It’s pretty gruesome for dinner talk.”

“If it would help you settle I don’t mind, I may be able to help.”

Will was quiet for a few minutes, he was not supposed to talk about active cases, like legally, but he did much less legal things on a monthly basis and he was curious what Hannibal would think.

“Two kills so far, the first was skinned, the second had no teeth. He’s… he doesn’t believe the people he’s killing are humans, they’re creatures, beasts, like slaying a dragon, he’s taking trophies to give to someone.”
Hannibal hummed, he finished his dishes with a flare and set one in front of Will.

“Chicken liver mousse with pickled strawberries and mustard seed.” Will had no idea what any of that was or how it worked but it smelled good so he took a bite. He hummed with delight at the flavour and Hannibal grinned before turning to something he had pulled from the oven that smelled divine.

“So your killer sees himself as Hercules, slaying the hydra and the boar.”

“Apparently, except he’s not Hercules, he’s following something, a story, a legend, it’s not random, they are specific beasts to him, whatever he takes from them has meaning.” He rubbed at his face as a familiar headache built behind his eyes.

“Well it seems you’ll be searching for another hero's journey then yes? Perhaps a book, our killer may have seen himself in something he’s read.”

“True, yes that’s… you could be right.” Hannibal smiled again.

“That does happen on occasion, now if you’d move to the dining room I will bring the plates.”

Will grabbed the wine and both glasses and moved into the opulent dining room adjacent to the kitchen, one wall was dominated by fresh herbs and the smell was heady.

He snorted at the over the top table setting that sat in front of him, the table was huge but only set for two, the unused space filled with a complicated centerpiece of cloth and antlers and dry flowers. Such a display should smell like a potpourri nightmare but the scent was mild, dry grass and subtle lavender, he liked it though he wouldn’t admit it to anyone. The wine glasses were settled into what he hoped was the right spot and the bottle he set in the bend of an antler before sitting at the seat to the right of the head of the table.

Hannibal returned a moment later with a full on dinner cart laden with what looked like a roast and a series of dishes, Will fought down a smile at the pageantry as he sliced and garnished and swirled before an artful plate was placed in front of him.

“Tarragon braised shank, roasted tomato and a potato pave. Enjoy”

Will gave him a soft smile but couldn’t help the sarcasm brewing on his tongue.

“I must say Dr. Lecter the last time someone pampered me this much they were trying desperately hard to get into my pants.”

“I find there is nothing greater in life than a good meal, besides you seem to need the pampering.”

He snorted, undignified as he cut himself a piece of meat and swirled it in some green sauce before popping it in his mouth. The flavour was rich, heady and delicious and he froze when he realized exactly what he was eating. He fought the urge to rumble at the taste he wasn’t expecting to get as he tried to re-categorize the situation.

Human, he was eating human.

“Wow, this is delicious,” he mumbled, his mind running a mile a minute. The smell, death and rot, the meat that was definitely human, Will could taste the tinge of terror, of coffee and medicine.

Was Hannibal like him?

He wasn’t sure if he’d be able to tell, he’d never met another, not since the incident and he was a little preoccupied at that point. Momentarily he thought that perhaps Hannibal had brought him here to kill him, to consume him, the irony was unparalleled but he wasn't overly worried, he could easily overpower the man if he was human. Hannibal had begun speaking and he forced himself to listen and focus.

“-yond delving into the minds of killers, what do you occupy your time with?” He asked, apparently unaware of Will’s momentary distraction. Will shrugged.

“Fishing, hiking, reading, I’m not one for much excitement.”

Hannibal gave him a half smile. “I’m sure whatever you do is exciting enough, what do you fish?”

The conversation flowed naturally, Will momentarily shelved his thoughts and enjoyed the meal and encompassing company that Hannibal was. Dinner was languid and drawn out, they finished Will’s wine and opened another, he was served a decadent dessert of raspberries and cream before being herded into an opulent study and given a glass of brandy. Hannibal lit a fire and settled into the chair across from Will.

“Tell me about the last time you were pampered”

“What?”

“During dinner, you said the last time you were taken care of they were trying to ‘get in your pants’ as you said.”

“Oh” he rubbed his neck, unsure of the change in conversation, “I was young, fresh out of college, met an older woman… she took me out to a really expensive restaurant.”

“Did you sleep with her?”

“Are you psychoanalyzing me?”

Hannibal kept watching him, didn’t respond, finally Will got uncomfortable and broke.

“I did, a few times” it was before the incident, the first had been in the back of her car. Hannibal hummed and took a sip of his drink.

“Have you always been in Virginia, Will?”

“No, only a few years, I grew up and lived in the South, Louisiana mostly.”

“Were you a profiler there?”

“Cop actually, got discharged after an accident.”

“An accident.” He seemed over intrigued, his eyes glinting in the low light. Will was bordering on too drunk for this conversation.

“I got hurt, my partner was killed, they deemed me too unstable to return to active duty.”

“I apologize.”

“It’s fine, things happen, I have some fun scars now.” He pulled aside his collar to show the mess of scar tissue on his shoulder, it went down his back, the bite had been more of a ripe.

The glint came back with a vengeance and Hannibal leaned forward. “What caused it?”

Will gave him a lazy smile, “a monster.”

They called it a night soon after, Hannibal offered Will the guest room which he declined. Hannibal walked him to the door with a hand on his lower back that was a tad too low to be polite, Will fought down the urge to jump the other man right there on the foyer floor and wished him goodnight.

He found alcohol rarely held anymore, twenty minutes into his drive he was sober and back to fretting, his mind a mile a minute. Will, to this day, didn’t really know what he was, werewolf was probably sort of right, he didn’t change with the full moon, silver didn’t bother him and most notably when he shifted to hunt he wasn’t a wolf, he was too big, dog-like but wrong.

The point was he didn’t know what he was so he had know way to tell what Hannibal was. All he could go on was the smell that wafted off of him like a siren’s call and the fact that he definitely ate and presumably killed people. The fact that he fed it to other people spoke more of a pathology, a game. Will never had the desire to share the meat he brought home, besides with his pack. So there were three possibilities.

1. Hannibal was the same as him but got off on sharing his hunts to some capacity.
2. Hannibal was something else that ate people (Will was not too realist to not believe there were other monsters out there.)
3. Hannibal was human and a cannibal and most likely a murderer.

He wasn’t sure what option he preferred but all of them gave him a sense of longing that there was someone that in some way might understand him, unbidden the thought of Hannibal, poised and cold, joining him on a hunt. If Hannibal was human it would be more complicated, getting him to believe, to not fear, maybe it would be worth it though.

By the time Will made it back to Wolf Trap his mind was a mess of desire and nerves, he let the dogs out into the yard and stripped out of his clothes, the shift dulled his mind, letting his instincts take over. His dogs swirled around him, licking at his face in greeting, he barked at them once, sharp, and took off into the woods, his pack loping on his heels.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Little bit of sexy time in this one. Enjoy friends

Two weeks without a major case gave Will enough of a break to take a guest speaker spot in Washington for 5 days. It gave him a chance to take a break from the general hell of working with the BAU and the situation he was avoiding with Dr. Lecter. They had eaten together once more and Will couldn't figure out the man any better than the first meal, he was infallible and it was both infuriating and weirdly attractive.

He left for Washington before the sun rose on a Sunday and had most of the day to himself. He hadn't got a chance to hunt before he left and the need was a gentle buzz under his skin, threatening but not yet potent.

The trip was to be three days of lectures then he had been slated to attend a conference on behavioral analyses, the days past in a whirl of lectures and questions and a million people shaking his hand and by the time he made it back to the airport to return home he was sorely regretting ever thinking this would be a break.

He landed in Baltimore with four missed calls and an absolute downpour of rain. His head ached and he wanted nothing more than to go home and hide away for two days but Jack called him again as he trudged to his truck and told him they had found what they believed was one of the Collectors kills.

He made it to the scene an hour later, Jack was waiting for him, looking like a drenched cat standing in the rain in front of an abandoned house.

"Squatters found the body, it's almost two months old but it looks like him." He told Will as he led him into the house, it was dusty and decrepit, the rain heightening the smell of rotting wood and mold. They filtered past the forensic team into a bedroom, the body laid on the bed springs, it was decomposing, deflated and infested, but there was enough left for Will to see.

The window was smashed out and letting in a torrent of rain and frigid air, he shivered as he approached the bed and tried to focus.

The beast was so scared, fought so hard, I find victory and guilt

I take my trophy and give the beast a death shroud

My gift is not enough, I will improve

The killer settled under his skin like a parasite, feverish in his devotion, Will fought to shake him free as he turned to Jack.

“It’s definitely him, earlier but not the first, the eyes were most likely carved out with the same knife he used to skin the pool girl,” Will glanced back at the body, there was a old persian rug wrapped around in, burial shroud, “he felt bad about this one, she fought him, he tried to honour her…”

“So he’s escalating, getting more delusional.” Jack guessed, Will nodded.

“These first ones.. He may have still thought them as people to some degree, he doesn’t anymore.”

“We need to find where he’s getting this narrative from.”

“It might not help us Jack,” he was exhausted, didn’t want to be trapped in this nightmare of a puzzle anymore.

“Find it,” was the only answer he got before Jack stormed out of the room, Will stared at the body for a while more before he followed him out.

Any attempt to argue for Will to go home was shot down and he found himself back at Quantico searching through fantasy book plots. Beverly sat across from him, throwing out titles and plots for him to shoot down and Will was slowly going insane.

Price came in at some point to inform them there were remnants of honey in both the victims eye sockets and mouth which confirmed the killer. Will stared at the white board they had made listing the kills in order and tried to decipher anything that could help.

Hannibal called him around supper time to ask about his trip, expressing a mild pity at the fact Will was back at work. They talked briefly but Will was exhausted and irritable so ended the conversation before it could go sour.

The night dragged on, hours lost to mindless, pointless searching and burnt coffee. The sun was cresting the horizon when Will decided he had enough, he made to stand when Jack came charging in the room.

“We have a body,”

“Collector?” Will asked weakly. Jack grimaced.

“Ripper”

Beverly swore behind him and he fought the urge to break something. He wanted to go home and sleep but Jack would never let him pass up on a Ripper scene, besides they were usually sort of refreshing compared to the normal swill of murder he dealt with.

The Chesapeake Ripper had been quiet for almost eight months at that point and the fact he had returned while they were in the middle of such a nightmare case like the Collector did not bode well for Will's sleep schedule.

He rode with Jack to the scene, they pulled into a junkyard and parked beside a squad car. The morning sun glaring in his eyes as he slid out of the SUV and trudged over to a wreck of cars that was alight with activity.

Will stopped short beside Jack and took in the scene in front of him. It was a woman, her face ghostly pale with her blonde hair braided into an interlocking web over her face and falling down her arms in ropes. Her skin had been removed, but not all of it, rather it had been carved away in a swirling pattern of flowers and smoky swirls, bloodless and clean.

The stark contrast of her pale skin and the purple/red of her bared muscles was beautiful and Will could not help but gasp at the immaculate nature of the design.

Will had always appreciated the Ripper, his beauty and elegance in his work, it's not as though Will had any moral ground in the matter. He shook his reverence free and tried to focus, to give Jack something other than a lament of the scene's beauty.

"He's mimicking the Collector, but proving he's better"

"So it's a pissing contest." Jack huffed out, Will shook his head.

"Sort of, it feels more directed, like the exhibition is for someone specific, the relation to the Collector like an inside joke."

"So that's it? He wanted to show off cause somebody else has more attention at the moment."

"I don't know Jack, the Ripper isn't pathological, he just does what he wants, it's hard to try and navigate that."

Jack glared at the body, unmoving, Will risked a deep breath and winced at the smell of metal and grease that burned on his exhausted mind. Finally Jack moved, he ran a hand down his face and gestured harshly at the scene.

"Keep looking, we need more."

Will bit back a retort and tried to focus, he found his mind drifting as he looked over the inter woven lines carved into skin, could think of nothing but how it would feel to run his tongue over the grooves, taste the muscle and fat and sinew so lovingly carved by the Ripper.

Heat and hunger flashed through his mind, he had gone too long, could feel the need pulling at his very soul.

He must have zoned out for a while because the sun was much higher when a cop jostled his elbow and knocked him out of his daze, he winced at the influx of sound and smell now that his focus had broken. His eyes burned and his skin ached and felt like crying, or screaming, he gave the body one more look before turning away.

Jack was calling for him once again and he gathered every last ounce of focus he could muster and got back to work.

By the time he was able to leave the scene Will was alight with tension, an officer drove him back to Quantico as Jack had already run off and the smell of the man's cologne was enough to make Will want to smash his face onto the steering wheel and rip his heart from his chest. He managed to get away with no violence but he felt unmoored, exhausted and agitated. The thought of going inside and trying to do any work seemed impossible so he headed to his car instead.

He intended to just take a break, to go and get a coffee and sit outside until his skin stopped feeling so tight and his mind rested but a very fuzzy drive found him on Hannibal's driveway staring at his front door like it was salvation. His instincts told him he would be safe here, the animal part of his brain desperate for a warm place to rest.

The day was still bright and hot, Hannibal was probably at work, he was being creepy and insane, he needed to *go home.* He knocked anyway, waited, when nobody came he felt tears prickle in his eyes.

Leaving was the obvious next step but he was tired, it was a two hour drive home and he just wanted to lay down, to sit in the stupid study and breath in the smell of Hannibal and herbs and sleep.

He sat down, if somebody saw him they're gonna think he's some crazy person but he couldn't bring himself to care, the sun was hot on his face as he leaned against the pillar leading to Hannibal's front door and closed his eyes. He'd rest for a moment, just ten minutes to gather himself then he would get up and drive home.

"Will?" a voice came from in front of him, he groaned quietly, he was slumped over on something hard, his body ached. He flinched when a hand cradled his face and cracked an eye open to see Hannibal crouched in front of him with something akin to concern on his face. He was speaking, Will couldn't process what he was saying.

"M'tired, just-" he couldn't remember what was wrong, why he couldn't be where he was, "just wanted to sleep." He closes his eyes again but Hannibal seemed to have other plans as he pulled Will up straight.

"And sleep you shall but somewhere other than the doorstep, let's get you inside." He nudged Will to his feet and led him inside. Will breathed deep, sighing at the familiar smell that seeped the tenison from his bones, Hannibal helped him out of his coat and shoes before leading him gently into his study.

"When was the last time you ate Will?" he asked as he settled him on a couch and wrapped him in a blanket. Will rolls his head to the side and tries to think, probably yesterday, a sandwich while they poured over books.

"Yesterday," he muttered.

Hannibal huffed out a breath and turned to leave, Will was vaguely disappointed but took it as an opportunity to fall back asleep. It was short lived, Hannibal returned in a blink of an eye with a tray that smelled divine. He nudged Will till he sat up and put a plate on his lap, a warm sandwich and slices of apple along with a glass of water.

Food wasn't really a top priority at the moment but Hannibal sat beside him and coaxed him into finishing it all before taking it away and finally allowing Will to lay down. A second blanket was laid over him and the curtains of the study were closed, casting Will in cool darkness, he was asleep before Hannibal made it back to him.

He woke up some time later with a start, it took him a second to process, he was on Hannibal's couch, wrapped in a pile of blankets, the room was dark and warm and there was a mug perched on the table in front of him.

Tired confusion gave way to pure humiliation when he remembered what he had done. He shot upright, his head pounded and his skin ached but it wasn't nearly as bad as earlier. Memories return to him in a wave, he fell asleep on Hannibal's doorstep like some pathetic lost dog, they weren't close yet, they had a few meals, this was too much, boundaries crossed that could not be revoked, Will showing how unstable and needy he was.

Hannibal was too kind to just leave him delirious on his driveway, or he was embarrassed and wanted Will inside before he affected Hannibal's reputation. It was ruined, whatever this was. Will didn't even know what to do at that point. He could just leave, send him a text and apologize and promise to never return or find the man and try and apologize like an adult and maybe, maybe salvage some form of friendship, acquaintance, anything.

Humiliatingly Will feels tears well in his eyes, he's just tired he tells himself, burnt out, he hadn't had a proper hunt in much too long and it throws his emotions off.

He needed to leave, just leave and send Hannibal a message apologizing and promising to never do it again. He didn't move, just stared at the mug on the side table and let the tears slip down his face as exhaustion washes over him, he just wanted to lay back down.

The choice was taken from him when the study door opened and Hannibal walked in. Will couldn't look at him so he kept his eyes on the mug in front of him, he could feel the tracks of tears on his face but made no move to wipe them off.

"Will?" he called, Will didn't move, Hannibal sighed and moved to settle beside him, he obviously caught the miserable look on his face. "Is something wrong? Are you injured?"

Will shook his head, Hannibal grabbed the mug off the table and pressed it into his limp hands.

"Alright, just breathe then, you can go back to sleep if you need." He set a gentle hand on Will's lower back and the urge to start sobbing was overwhelmingly strong. Instead he scrubbed his free hand down his face and tried to gather himself.

"Sorry, god I'm so sorry, I shouldn't have come here that was insane, I don't know what I was thinking. I'll go, I can, fuck I'm sorry-"

“Will,” a firm hand on his shoulder stops his fumbling as he tries to escape his blanket nest, “I am not angry with you, you were obviously exhausted, it is reasonable that you came here.”

Will huffs out a wet laugh, “it really wasn’t.”

Hannibal smiles at him, “none the less you did and I am not mad, now would you like to sleep more or shall we have dinner? It’s just past seven.”

Confusion wares with relief and Will is too tired to fight it so he just gives the man a weak smile, “dinner sounds good.” Hannibal nodded and led him into the dining room with a gentle hand between his shoulder blades.

He settled Will into the dining room and put his mug of tea in front of him before slipping back into the kitchen. Will laid his head on the polished wood table and tried to focus, to gather himself, he was exhausted and starving and humiliated and the mash of feelings was overwhelming. The urge to cry had not left and he dug his nails into his thigh to try and distract himself, the sound of footsteps caused him to jerk back in his seat and Hannibal came back in the room with two plates and a teapot.

He refilled Will’s cup and set a plate in front of him, it was much simpler than the last few dinners they had had but Will found himself grateful. He wasn't sure he could handle exotic spices and smells with how strung out his senses were. He cut himself a piece of meat and failed spectacularly at fighting off an appreciative hum when he remembered what he was being fed. The flavour was slightly different, a different kill, bitterness caused by alcohol and a greasiness that spoke of someone overweight. Still it helped dampen the hunger under his skin and made it easier for him to breathe, to settle.

They ate quietly, Hannibal obviously aware of Will’s general distress, he tried to come up with anything to say that wouldn’t just be mindless begging or excuses and decided he would simply wait for Hannibal’s verdict, whenever he felt the urge to deliver it.

When their meal was done Hannibal gathered their plates and directed Will to return to the study, he opened his mouth to argue, well aware he was now overstaying his welcome but Hannibal just tapped his cheek in chastisement and left the room. He returned to the study and settled back into his nest of blankets, after a moment he popped back up and went over to light a fire. Hannibal came in with a wine glass and another mug that smelled like heaven just as Will got the fire going and smiled at him.

“Thank you Will,” he settled himself on the couch, languid like a cat in his bespoke suit, Will ducked his head at the blush that spread across his face and returned to his spot. Hannibal handed him the mug and he laughed when he realized it was hot chocolate, complete with whipped cream and cinnamon powder.

“You know I may not be the poster child for maturity and such but I don’t need to be treated like an actual child.” It was supposed to be a joke but he still felt raw, like an exposed nerve and it ended up sounding defensive even to his own ears.

“I don’t see how hot chocolate is childish, you could use the sugar and are deserving of a reward.”

“Reward? For what, being insane?”

“For coming to me when you needed help.”

“I didn’t need help, I was just…” he didn’t have a good argument, falling asleep on someone's doorstep in the middle of the afternoon while sober didn’t exactly have a strong argument for competency.

He took a sip of his drink and hummed at the sugary warmth, Hannibal ran a hand over his shoulder and across his neck, squeezing before retreating. Will turned to look at him, his face was carefully neutral but there was an interest, a hunger in his eyes, Will shivered.

“You were exhausted and overought, you went where you knew you were safe.” Hannibal spoke as if this was normal, acceptable, Will laughed and scrubbed a hand down his face.

“You shouldn’t be okay with this.”

“It is my choice to establish what is okay and what is not, I am flattered you felt safe enough to come to me when you felt vulnerable.”

His hand came back, it settled lightly on Will’s leg, halfway between his knee and his groin, his muscle tensed voluntarily and he hid his face in his mug to hide the heat on his face.

“Well I’m sorry anyways, even if you were flattered, I imposed on you.”

“You are never an imposition.” He sounded sincere, serious. Will couldn’t bring himself to look at the man so he focused on his drink and the fire and the smell of death and copper that blanketed the room around him. Hannibal sipped his wine, quiet and relaxed, his hand didn’t move, stayed on Will’s leg.

They sat in silence for a while, Will stuck between nervous uncertainty and a sparking hunger that grew the longer he sat bathed in Hannibal’s scent. It was both a familiar hunger and an entirely new one, the urge to consume, to hunt and a startling urge to be consumed, to be held and understood.

He shifted, aroused and unsure, his mug was finally empty and he forced himself to set it down. Trying to calm himself he took a deep breath and immediately regretted it when he got a lungful of *death rot copper* overlayed with the smell of burning wood, sugar and *want.*

He shifted again as the fire in his gut grew and gasped when Hannibal slid his hand higher, the man was still staring calmly at the fire but his grip was firm as it skated up Will’s jeans and danced over his inseam.

The hunger went from a spark to an inferno and Will huffed out a breath, fighting the instincts that welled in his mind. He turned to Hannibal, more monster than man as he spun onto all fours and crawled the scant few inches to hover over the man.

They stared at each other, Hannibal's hand, displaced from his thigh, slid up his arm, teasing a slow trail over his shoulder and down his flank. The man seemed passive, curious, but his eyes burned and Will could smell the want on him.

He knew he was being strange, out of character, but the beast under his skin was coming out to play and he couldn't bring himself to reel it in. Hannibal's hand settled under his shirt on his ribs and Will rumbled out a pleased sound.

"Sensual creature, what do you need?" Hannibal asked softly, his accent more pronounced in his hunger. Will just hummed at him, beyond words. He shifted his weight forward and crawled half into the man's lap to press their lips together. Hannibal squeezed his ribs and lifted his other arm to pull Will in close as he devoured him.

Will knew he was being too rough, tongue and teeth and possessive fingers wrinkling an expensive shirt but he couldn't make himself stop. He settled into Hannibal's lap and slid one hand around his back and one through his hair to hold him close. Hannibal allowed this with a pleased hum of his own as he mapped across Will's back and ribs with curious fingers.

Will ached, a deep seated desire that made his lungs burn and his dick turn to diamond in his pants. He rocked himself forward and moaned at the too-rough friction, did it again, and again. Hannibal indulged him, sliding a hand down to his lower back and pushed him forward, deeping the movement into a spin tingling grind. Will broke the kiss to moan and bury his face under Hannibal's chin as he was overcome with heat and pleasure.

Hannibal was murmuring to him, switching languages as he praised and encouraged, his fingers a bruising grip on Will's hips. Between one breath and the next he found himself shoved back into the couch and Hannibal crowded over him, a knee shoved between his thighs and he groaned at the pleasurable ache of too much pressure. Hannibal's hands caged his head in as he leaned down to kiss him again, hunger built, bloomed with heat and want. Hannibal rocked forward, digging his thigh into Will's groin as he kissed across his cheek and up his temple and suddenly Will was staring at his neck.

Suddenly, Will was back in his apartment in New Orleans, laid out on the kitchen linoleum with blood in his mouth and a body dying above him. The hunger brewing under his skin melted away into terror and he shoved Hannibal away. The man sat back immediately, ruffled and concerned as Will rolled off the couch onto the ground. He would not hurt Hannibal like that, he didn't want to. When the man reached for him he scrambled back, getting his feet under him and shaking his head roughly.

"I'm sorry I need to- I'm sorry,"

"Will, darling, just breathe," Hannibal didn't reach for him again but Will couldn't settle, he could still smell Hannibal, his arousal burned away under concern.

"I'm sorry, I need to go," he practically ran out of the room, stopping long enough to rip his coat from the rack, knocking it to the ground with a thud and grabbing his shoes in his hand. He ran outside barefoot and threw himself into his truck. He could see Hannibal in the side mirror, standing on the doorstep and he sped away into the night.

Once again Will spent the night shifted in the woods, he left his pack this time and ran until his lungs burned and his legs were weak. He caught a rabbit, ripped it to shreds and devoured it, bones and all.

It helped a bit, cleared his mind, but a clear mind only made way for more humiliation and panic to settle in his mind. Thinking about Hannibal was off limits, thinking about his scent or hands or the carefully placid look on his face as Will drove away would drive him into a spiral and he couldn't handle that.

He needed to go back to work, Jack had called him seventeen times since he realized Will hadn't gone back to Quantico. Will couldn't bring himself to return, to face the world when his mind and body were at war with each other so he shut off his phone and went fishing. The day was clear but cold and the river was plentiful, six hours of blissful silence and calm had Will returning home with three fish and a plan.

He would go hunting the next day, eat, reset himself, then he would return to work. What happened with Hannibal could not happen again, he would allow some vague friendship but his infatuation with the man would have to go.

Even if he was some kind of killer Hannibal was still a human and would be no match for Will in the end, he couldn't risk growing attached then slipping up and killing him. No more dinners, he told himself, distance, time, he would go back to how it was before and Hannibal would be safer for it. He built a fire and ignored the ache in his chest at the idea of losing whatever he had with the doctor but it was for the best, he told himself.

The evening was quiet and peaceful, the dogs, tired out from a day in the woods, slept around his feet while he read. He let his senses stretch out and listened to the woods around him and the gentle sound of seven heart beats and relaxed into the rhythm. This was all he needed, his dogs, the woods, the promise of a hunt, just this.

When he finished his drink he washed the glass and risked checking his phone. There were six more calls from Jack and a few threatening text messages. He jolted when he saw a single message from Hannibal.

I will be waiting when you are ready.

He frowned, felt a swirl of guilt and fondness, he shut his phone back off and left it on the couch, he went upstairs to change. It was for the best, he told himself, it had to be for the best.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

> Slight warning: It is implied Will eats someone alive, not terrible graphic but skip to the first break if that's gonna make your brain sad.

Will decided to skip the bars all together in finding his next prey, it wasn't intentional, he'd picked out a swanky little hipster bar in Maryland and was planning to go later. Unfortunately, he'd gone early enough to go get more supplies for fly making and found himself stuck in a rather unpleasant interaction with a rather unpleasant man. He was unsure what his slight was and stood impassively as the man put on a tirade that would put even Crawford to shame.

The man smelled like talc and mustard, he was brazen and rude, Will decided he would do just fine, he was feeling a little zealous.

Six hours later found him at his hunting ground with his prey. Fully shifted the man's smell was an almost unpleasant mix of deli sandwich, car exhaust and whatever hyper manly cologne he wore but Will could smell his flesh under it all, red blooded, rich and savory.

He waited in the bushes while the man awoke, the subtle breeze cool and pleasant through the fur and feathers across his hackles. It took a while, he'd maybe hit the man too hard in his eagerness but eventually he stumbled to his feet and shouted into the woods. Will circled a few times, letting anticipation thrum under his skin, letting sticks crack and leaves shift as his prey breathed heavy and panicked into the crisp night air.

Finally when he felt a peak in his mind he stepped out, the man stared for a beat, two, before stumbling back. Will rumbled deep in his throat and advanced, the man let out a panicked little shriek and fell, he was wearing loafers, not great for running. Only a moment passed before the man seemed to understand the danger he was in and shook free from the frozen terror to dart off into the woods. Will counted slowly, salivating, hungry.

3

2

1

With a snarling rumble he took off after his prey.

He kept to a lope, fencing the man in as he stumbled through the bush, he was slow, annoyingly so, and clumsy as he tripped and slid. Will hemmed in to his right and began pushing him towards the ravine, he kept out of sight, snarling and snapping to push his prey

where he wanted. He knew this hunt would be short lived, boring, but he wanted the terror, wanted to see his rude little hare fight for his survival.

The ravine was close by, the sound of water and the smell of damp giving him some direction in his prey driving. The man fell again, crying out when he cut himself on the rocks but pushed on, the dense woods were giving away to rocky scrubs and Will let his cover fall away as he leapt out beside the man with a snap. His prey screamed, high and reedy and dove away from him, they had reached the ravine and Will circled him to push him down the steep cliff.

The man tried to keep to the ridge, dodging shakily through rocks but Will was faster, bigger and persistent, he kept on him until he was forced to descend. A shout of frustration and anguish sent a shiver down his spine as the man went skidding down the steep hill, Will could smell his blood as he gashed himself on the sharp rock and shrubbery. He followed him down, his taloned paws much more suited to the rough terrain, the man noticed him and began moving faster, trying to run, he tripped and fell forwards. Will watched as he barrel rolled a good few feet before snagging on a bush and stopping, he was groaning, bloody and torn, Will descended on the man with a predatory focus.

He watched as his prey struggled to get up again but something must have broken or dislocated because he couldn't get his feet under him again, he began crawling, desperate and bloody down the ravine.

Will let him for a while, content to watch his hunt fight its demise, they were nearing the bottom when he finally decided to strike.

His jaw closed around the man's thigh and he let out a shrieking scream as Will bit down and rumbled at the taste of blood in his mouth.

Terror, burnt coffee and onion, rich and pungent of his tongue. He wanted more, was hungry for the violent bloody conclusion of his hunt, he ripped his mouthful away and swallowed, his prey was still screaming but he paid it no mind, the trees in the ravine hid him as he tucked into his feast and the roaring river covered the sounds of the hunts dying screams.

A few hours later saw Will carefully pulling the remains of the meat from his kill and packing them into bags, clothes and shoes were sealed in a bag and would be discarded later. He was half naked and bloody, satisfaction a dull thrum in his chest as he pulled meat from bones. He was gathering up his bag when he heard something crack off to his right then silence, he perked up swinging around. A deep breath yielded nothing but the smell of blood on his skin and loamy rot of the earth he'd churned up but he could feel something, someone.

Slowly, he laid down to obscure himself in the shrubbery and let his senses extend out, damp, rot, blood, fur, lingering terror from his kill. No human smell, no trepidation or fear, he breathed out a sigh and pulled himself, shouldering his bag and beginning the hike back to his car.

The Collector dropped his next kill three days later and Will found himself slightly more prepared this time, it helped that it had been midday and he was already at Quantico when the call came in. It was cold but clear and Will took a deep breath of the fresh air as he slid out of his truck in preparation of dealing with whatever lay in the alley in front of him. For once he'd beat Jack there so he took a moment to observe from a far before diving in.

The body was propped against the wall of an alley, still dressed, mostly clean and notably headless, he couldn't see if the head was there from where he stood so he took another deep breath and went in. Price was already there poking around, Will walked up behind him.

"Head?"

"No thank you" Price grinned at him, Will frowned until he relented. "No, not in the alley, they're taking all the bags to go through them though."

Will nodded, Price left him to do his thing. He settled cross legged beside the body and closed his eyes, he could smell the honey on the body over the smell of garbage and car exhaust. His mind stilled and the pendulum swung.

A beast in human skin, sever its head to reveal it's true nature

Leave it in it's domain to be reclaimed

So many pieces collected, so soon

My gift shall be of legend

I will be revered

Will opened his eyes and for a moment the body before him was not human, it was scaled, fiery orange and winged, he saw himself slaying a dragon in its cave and taking its head to mount. The vision clung to him like fly paper and he shook himself free. He could still smell cooking meat and spice but assumed, hoped, it was coming from the body and not the vision.

Jack was at the mouth of the alley with Price and Katz and he walked back to them.

"What building is that?" he asked point at the brick wall supporting the body, Price shrugged.

"A restaurant, real fancy one, Bona-something"

"The victim worked there, probably in the kitchen." Jack nodded. "He's almost done, reaching the end of whatever story he's following."

"So we're gonna lose him." Jack smelled angry, frustrated, gasoline and staleness. "Four bodies Graham, *four bodies* and you apparently can't give me anything about this killer!"

Will winced, he wanted to lash out but he drew himself in and tried to focus, remain calm.

“We know it’s a man, solitary, strong enough to overpower his victims and move their bodies, he has some interest in fantasy or roleplaying, not unattractive but socially awkward enough to struggle meeting people and sick or delusional enough to believe what he’s doing is real.”

“That's not enough!” Jack bellowed.

“I don’t have any more!” Will yelled back, everyone around them went quiet, still. “I’m trying Jack but I’m not a fucking genie, figure out where the thread came from, connect the victims, find the goddamn book yourself.”

Jack glared at him, “I hired you to catch killers, *catch him."* Neither man moved, stuck in a staring contest until Jack finally stomped away.

Price whistled low beside him and Will spun around to stare at the body again.

“We’ll talk to the restaurant, see if they're missing anyone,” Beverly offers quietly, Will nods and tries to refocus.

“Any honey on this one?” he asked as the three of them returned to the body.

“Yup, on the neck and hands, head was cut clean off, probably not here, the alley is too clean.”

“Dragons are weaker away from their territory…” Will murmured, Price gave him a weird look.

“Sure, no signs of cause of death but it might be on the head.”

The scene was scoured and documented in short order and Will began walking back to his car to return to Quantico. They were in some sort of boutique district and the street was lined in fancy little shops and restaurants. He decided to go on a bit of a walk, mostly to spite Jack, he glanced in windows and enjoyed the mingling smells of fresh bread and floral perfume when he noticed a bookstore tucked between a coffee shop and a tailor.

The window was filled with stacks of books which he glanced over. In the corner, at the bottom of the stack there was a yellow book with gold letters embossed on it.

The Gold Knight and The Quest of Six

It should have meant nothing to him, but something in his mind caught, he went into the store on instinct and asked for the book out of the window. There was a slightly musty couch tucked away in the corner of the shop and he settled onto it and flipped the book open.

The third beast, Balnagia, a great cat with golden fur… fought in a colosseum for the nobles to cheer… its skin like a golden blanket… bound in golden thread to bind its soul… ambrosia of the gods…

The serpent would reawaken, the knight removed its teeth and left the petals of a gora flower as a gift… ambrosia of the gods

He lured the great dragon from its cave… a glorious battle… its head came free with a mighty cleave, the body he returned to its hoard…

The final quest… carved from its chest a heart of stone…

He lay the six at her feet… a kiss upon his face as she exalted his bravery…

" Sir?" a timid voice pulled him free, Will looked up sharply at the shop keeper, "we're closing soon, would you like to buy that?" the woman asked gently. Will nodded in a daze, buying the book and hurrying back to his car. It was getting dark, he had a lot of missed calls but he paid it no mind. He crashed into Jack's office out of breath.

"I found it," he panted, "I found the story." He hurried back out before Jack could speak.

"Okay so pool girl,"

"Sarah Lewis."

"Right, Sarah Lewis is the bal-blanag. The big cat."

Will sat with the book open as Beverly wrote on the white board, a photo of the pool victim beside a number three.

"Yep, fourth victim, Christopher Guild, is the serpent," Beverly wrote beside the picture, Will flipped back a ways, "then the girl in the house,"

"We identified her as Amanda Gelom," Jack supplied from where he stood behind Will.

"Gelom was second, she's the um," he scanned a few pages, "gor-da-ven-chi? Seems like a medusa rip off, turns people to sand when it looks at them."

"Okay, then today was five."

"We ID him yet?" Jack nodded.

"You were right, head chef at Bonatoro, Filip De Santo."

"Okay so De Santo is the dragon."

"And you said there were six in total?" Beverly asked. A one and a six stood empty on the white board.

"The first and the last, we can assume he hasn't killed the last yet but the first we're looking for someone missing their ribs."

Jack was staring at the board as Will rifled through the book again, “why the honey?” he asked after a few minutes.

“It’s a stand in for ambrosia, a blessing on the bodies, or on the blood spilled. The sign of the… sun god? Like holy water I think.”

Alana came in the room with a frown and a sheet of paper. “The book was written twelve years ago, it’s a pen name with no connection to an actual person.”

Will scrubbed a hand down his face, “so it could be the author, or somebody that read the book.”

“There can’t be that many copies printed.”

“Even a limited edition would still be in the thousands.”

“So if it’s not the author we have nothing,” Jack asked, there was a beat of silence before he swore, “figure out who the author is and get the sale records for the book in Baltimore, maybe we’ll get lucky and he’s lived here the whole time.”

They did what they could, but sale records would take forever and so would the search for the ribless body so Will decided to go home and get some sleep.

He dreamt of the killer, himself and a man in shimmery golden armour in an arena, he was shifted, almost eye level with the man even in this form as he stalked and growled. The knight had a sword that seemed to glow even in the bright sunlight of the arena and he was unafraid as he advanced on Will.

The fight was drawn out, flashes of pain and blood, the Knight swung his sword and caught Will’s shoulder before kicking him in the chest. He fell, wounded and unable to fight back, the knight advanced on him, his golden helmet pulled away to reveal a face, suddenly it was Hannibal standing over him, glowing in his golden armour. His eyes shined with disgust as he leaned down and placed a hand on Will’s chest.

Monster

He murmured before his hand plunged in and he pulled Will’s heart from his chest.

Will awoke with a start, his hand going to his chest. He still hadn’t contacted Hannibal, wasn't sure if he could without spilling his guts.

The clock said it was just past six so he hauled himself up to start his day, unwilling to return to his dreams even for an hour of sleep. The weather had finally given way to winter and it was snowing lightly outside.

He took the dogs out and watched as they bound around the yard, sniffing and playing before whistling them back inside to eat. He made it to Quantico by nine parked before heading towards the building.

The smell of *death rot* caused him to stop dead as he spun around in a slow circle, Hannibal was standing by his car ten feet ahead, unaware of Will's approach, or more likely pretending to be unaware, allowing him an escape. He wanted the out but knew it was unfair, Hannibal had done nothing wrong and didn't deserve the avoidance and frigidity he was getting. Will sucked in a deep breath, ran a hand through his hair and approached the doctor.

"Dr. Lecter." He greeted, staring at the lapels of the man's jacket.

"Will."

They stood in silence for a moment.
"I'm sorry for the other night, I can't really explain why I did what I did but I'm sorry."

"You can't explain or you can't tell me?"

Will frowned, "the second one."

"I see, well I accept your apology, I came to invite you for dinner tonight."

Will looked up at the man, his face was still and impassive but his eyes burned.

"I really shouldn't, we can't-" he didn't know what to say, how to say it. "I shouldn't have let this go as far as it did."

He took a step back, retreating, Hannibal slid forward smoothly and gripped just above Will's elbow. Will gasped lowly at the contact but didn't resist as Hannibal steered him until his back hit the car and a warm body settled against his front.

"Why not?" Hannibal asked conversationally, as though he didn't currently have Will pinned to his car in the middle of a parking garage. "Do you fear me William? Or do you fear yourself?"

"I- what? No it's not that I just," his brain was shorting from the contact, the heat and smell and reminder of the last time they were this close. He continued to flounder and Hannibal made no move to help or stop him, he kept Will pinned tight to the car with his body and ran gloved fingers over his flanks and hips. Will shivered at the contact and tried to twist away but Hannibal held fast. He could get out if he really wanted to, he knew he was much stronger than the doctor, it was warm though, and the feeling of being trapped was spurring something in his brain he didn't want to look at too hard.

"Have dinner with me Will, I'm sure we can work through whatever is eating at you," he all but purred in Will's ear, he shook his head then groaned when the pressure on his body increased ever so slightly and a thigh settled ever so slightly between his own.

"I can't Hannibal, it's not, we can't" he couldn't gather his thoughts enough to come up with a reasonable lie and Hannibal seemed entirely unwilling to relent.

"Have dinner with me." It sounded like a request but the fire in Hannibal's eyes made it seem like a demand, an order. Will groaned as the pressure shifted upwards and dropped his face to Hannibal's shoulder in defeat.

“Fine.” He stumbled as the pressure released all at once as Hannibal stepped back and smoothed his coat.

“Good,” he purred, “I will see you at seven tonight.” he smiled when Will made no move to get off his car and pet a hand over his shoulder, “better head inside, you have murderers to catch.”

Will nodded and righted himself before hurrying into the building without looking back.

Work was a haze, Will taught two lectures then spent a few hours on the Collector case, the entire time his mind was turning over what happened that morning. Desire had been a low hum in his chest the entire day, overwashed by a general feeling of fruitless panic. He *wanted,* he wanted to have and consume and the overwhelming hunger scared him.

Nonetheless, he left Quantico on time and drove to Hannibal’s house. The snow had settled into a thick blanket on the road and Will shivered as he climbed out of the truck and trudged up Hannibal’s driveway. The man opened the door before Will was able to knock and gave him a soft smile as he ushered Will into the house.

“I’m happy you came.”

“Didn’t really get a choice now did I?”

Hannibal grinned, “you always have a choice darling.”

He just huffed in response and shrugged his jacket off, Hannibal pulled it from his shoulders and led him into the kitchen with a hand on his back. Will was deposited in a chair in the corner that definitely wasn’t there the last time he was there and given a glass of whiskey.

“How is the hunt going?” Hannibal asked, Will choked on his drink and coughed roughly.

“What?”

“You’re hunt, for the Collector.”

“Oh, fine, we found the story he’s following.”

“How lucky,”

“Mmh, it’s a fantasy book, *The Gold Knight and the Quest of Six.”* He drops his voice into a false bravado for the title before snorting and taking another drink.

“I see, his own little fantasy world to act out his desires.”

“He doesn’t *desire* to kill, he wants to be loved and believes he’s this knight, knights slay dragons and get princesses.”

Hannibal only hummed as he put a final garnish on their plates and directed Will into the dining room. Dinner was heart, an irony after Will's dream but it was rich and delicious, not as good as eating one fresh and beating but still. They chatted idly, Hannibal asked about

Will's fishing and dogs and Will asked about his work. The unspoken thing that hung over them smelled like cayenne and diesel and Will didn't know what to do to break it, so he didn't.

Once again dinner ended and Will found himself tucked in on the study couch with a glass of spiced tea and whiskey, it smelled like oranges and cinnamon and he breathed in the vapour as he watched Hannibal build a fire. He stared at the painting over the fire, it was a battle scene, a man against a great beast of feathers and fur.

"Quite the painting, seems a little monstrous to stare at in the evening."

Hannibal didn't turn around as he answered, " what is monstrous to one is beauty to another."

Will snorted at the idea, "our definition of beauty must be different."

"It must," the man dusted his hands off and moved to the couch, "do you believe monsters Will?"

"Like Dracula and werewolves?"

"To be specific, there are many legends to explain things people cannot process. Children often told of boogeymen to keep them safe from unsafe humans or environments."

"So you think monsters aren't real."

"I think people will perceive what they can understand. Have you heard of the Rougarou?"

"Maybe? Sounds sort of familiar." He wasn't super sure where this conversation was going.

"It's a legend of Louisiana, a creature that eats children out in the swamp. Commonly believed to be caused by Catholics not adhering to their Lenten promise."

"So it's a sinful werewolf," Will grinned at the man over the mug.

"Not a wolf exactly, a creature of blood and hunting, preying on any who dare to invade its territory."

Huh, that sounded… sort of familiar, he put it aside to think about later and turned back to the man.

"So it's a legend to keep New Orleans children in line, or to hide the horrors of humans doing wrong. There's terrible people in the world Dr. Lecter, sometimes we make up monsters to explain them away."

"You told me a monster gave you the scars on your shoulder, was that something you wanted to explain away?"

"Well according to the mandatory therapist I was highly traumatized and unstable, so even if it was a real monster we can't exactly trust my mind."

Hannibal stared at him for a moment, his face was blank and Will couldn't figure out what he was thinking.

"I believe you know what you saw but are unwilling to face the scorn of others if you were to speak about it. You trust your mind but do not trust others to believe you."

Will frowned, he knew what happened, had proof, but the observation made him feel like a child telling his father he was scared of the dark and being locked in the closet to 'get over it'.

"Maybe," was all he said and returned to the mug in his hands. They were quiet for a while, Will finished his drink and began to wander the room poking at the bookshelves and the harpsichord in the corner. The room smelled like Hannibal and woodsmoke and it made him relax, the anxiety fading under the warmth and comfort.

He climbed up the ladder to continue his circuit, Hannibal watched him calmly from the couch, sipping his wine and tracking his progress around the room. Eventually he ran out of things to examine but knew if he returned to the couch he would not be able to keep himself away from the man so he returned to the book shelf. He heard Hannibal stand up but kept his back to the room, he felt the man step up behind him and shivered at the warm air that skated across his neck.

"I believe monsters are what we make them, I believe we can find beauty in even the most horrible things." The man murmured as he slid a hand up Will's hip and under his shirt, his skin was warm against his stomach. Will spun and the hand tracked around, hiking his shirt up and stopping on his lower back.

He tried to step back but his foot hit the ladder and he ended up leaning against it, a parody of that morning with Hannibal pining him to inanimate objects, but now they were alone and the fire was bright and hot in Will's gut.

"I think some things are just horrible Dr. Lecter."

"Like what? Your murderers?"

"Some of them."

"Only some?"

"People die, sometimes their death is more important than their life."

"I don't think your coworkers would agree with you."

Will just shrugged, his shoulder dug into the ladder rungs. He pushed against Hannibal but the man didn't yield any space and they stood toe to toe as Will fruitlessly fought the urge to fall into the man.

Hannibal stared at him, Will stared at his tie, they stood still in time for several fraught minutes before Hannibal ducked his head and suddenly his mouth was on Will's neck. It was warm, dragging pressure and the blunt edge of teeth and Will groaned and rocked harder into

him. Hannibal kept at it, his hands possessive on Will's hips as he moved across his neck and down his shoulder, his mouth grazed the edge of Will's scar and he twitched at the contact.

"Does it still hurt?" he murmured into the skin, Will hummed a negative. Hannibal continues his trail, laving attention over the ridged skin of the scar before going back up Will's neck and moving back to claim his mouth in a biting kiss.

They stood there for a while, enjoying the heat and arousal in the air as Hannibal switched his attention between Will's mouth and his neck. It felt like an eternity later that the man pulled back and the fire in his eyes made Will ache.

He stared for a moment, calculating and calm before fully pulling away from Will and smoothing his shirt.

"It's getting late dear will, best you begin your trek home, yes?" His smile was gentle, polite but the fire in his eyes was scorching. Will nodded, dazed and painfully hard and allowed Hannibal to lead him to the door, tuck him into his coat and usher him out the door.

"I will see you soon." It wasn't a question.

"Yea sure, goodnight."

"Goodnight darling."

It took a few days to find the first body, long enough for Will to panic at least twice, do some fruitless research on rougarou and clean his fridge out of leftovers from his kill. He was once again avoiding Hannibal, the doctor had texted him once the day after he met and Will managed to answer him but that was their only conversation.

Part of him felt suspicious that Hannibal knew something, guessed something. It was a stupid suspicion, sane people don't just guess the person they're flirting with is a werewolf-monster thing. Though he'd been… intense, he was always intense but there was a way he looked at Will that night like he was searching for something and it put him ill at ease. Either way Will was avoiding him and would continue to do so until his mind and instincts stopped waring with each other.

There was no crime scene to see, the body had been found months ago. It had been much much rougher than the later ones and written off as a crime of passion.

A young man found in the basement of a condemned house, his chest eviscerated and six of his ribs removed. There was no record of honey on the wounds but it was too perfect not to be their victim. The body was gone, returned to the family and cremated, so there were only crime scene photos to go on. Will couldn't slip into the killer's mind through the photos but he had enough of him lingering to get the gist of it.

"He knows this one, so does whoever he's trying to court, this one was the first but it was also a crime of passion. He didn't intend to go on this whole hero's journey…" Will started at

the photos before his mind finally caught on something, he picked up the book and flipped to the beginning, “the first quest in the book, the knight almost died, he was unprepared and went to fight a vampire witch thingy, it almost kills him but he manages to stab it, our killer fought with this man, was wounded and managed to kill him, in that he saw himself as the gold knight and the delusion started.”

“So we have a connection.” Jack prompted.

“I think so,” Will nodded, staring back at their board which had gained another entry, only six was missing now.

“Alright, so we’re looking for some nerd who knew the first victim.” Will shook his head.

“He’s not, he’s not a loser, he’s handsome, quiet, reads or writes or both, he’s strong, has to be. He’s not going to seem like our killer, he’s going to be out of the limelight, stoic maybe.”

Jack nodded, still frowning. “Alright… I’ll see what we come up with.”

Will made it home after dark and immediately knew something was wrong.

It was quiet and still but even as he climbed out of the car he could tell someone was here. He didn’t have a gun but he didn’t need one as he walked nonchalant into the house, dropped his bag and fed the dogs while carefully checking all the windows. Whoever it was wasn’t in the house, he let the dogs go pee before sticking them back inside and heading to his shed.

He could smell them then, hyper sharp perfume and silver nitrate told him who it was immediately and he snarled his lip in anger.

She was standing frozen behind the shed, crouched behind a rain barrel, he could hear her breathing and the quiet hum of a recorder. He contemplated his options before slinking around the opposite side of the shed and coming up behind her.

“You know,” he started, Freddie Lounds spun around with a sharp gasp, her red hair fluffing around her face, “this is trespassing, I could call the cops.”

She recovered quickly, giving him a cocky smile, “maybe I just got lost, maybe I came looking for help and was harassed by an unstable man that lives in the middle of nowhere.”

Will heard the threat but gave it no mind. “And what? You were out here visiting grandma? There’s enough proof that you know exactly who I am and exactly where I live for anyone to believe that.”

She huffs, a frown of her own, starting, “well who knows, maybe I wanted your opinion on the Collector.”

“Do you usually ask for opinions at midnight while hiding behind a rain barrel?”

She stared at him, her face twisted into something colder, crueler. “Maybe I was scared, you’re a dangerous man Will Graham, spend too much time in the woods to be doing anything good.”

He didn’t react to that but his mind began to turn over, “Meaning?”

She grinned, “at least once a month you drive out of Wolf Trap and head north into wild country near Woodbridge, that’s where that woman went missing, what’s her name? Samantha Carmicheal.”

“Samantha Carmicheal was killed by her own fault, and wolves.”

“Nobody believes that Mr. Graham, and I’m very convincing, I’m sure I could link disappearances to every night I caught you driving out to Woodbridge.”

“You could also link disappearances to every time the president ate cesar salad or the phases of the moon, doesn’t mean you’re right.”

She didn’t falter, rather she seemed to grow more persistent, stepping closer to him.

“People don’t trust you, you’re an isolated freak that hunts serial killers, would be fitting if you were one yourself.”

“You’d think I’d be better at hiding my crimes, seeing as it’s my job. Besides you said it yourself, I’m a shut in who likes the woods, Woodbridge is good for hiking.”

“You’re not hiking.” She snaps, Will gives her a patronizing smile.

“I think it’s much more likely that I’m hiking than what? Murdering people?”

“I can and will prove you’re tied to this, I’ll have you splashed across every newspaper as the newest monster in Virginia. There’s nothing you can do to stop me.”

“You sure?” he asked, his voice barely above a whisper, she froze for a moment. She was small, he realzied, small and snarky and defenseless. It wasn’t very smart to kill people you know but she was getting on his nerves and Will was never one for grace. He took a step forward, another, on the third she stumbled back.

“You can’t hurt me, people know I came out here, they’ll come looking, they’ll blame you.”

“Oh I’m sure, do you want to know why there’s no other bodies found out in the woods, Miss Lounds?” He kept walking forward, driving her back towards the woods, “because there's *nothing to find.”*

The shift came over him as easy as breathing, he shook out of his clothes and watched as Freddie stumbled back with a warbled cry. She was fumbling with her purse, Will knew she had a gun, he lunged forward and ripped it from her grasp. He waited for her to gain her footing, to start running, the hunt would be short lived, but he would revel in it anyways.

Will woke at first light and decided he would take the dogs on a walk before work, then walked down the road (a usual route), walked down an abandoned service road(another usual route), where they suddenly came across a familiar car. Will returned to his house, fed the dogs, then meandered through the woods for a while, creating a web of trails as he went. Finally he returned to his house and called Crawford.

“Will.”

“Hi morning, this is a little weird but I took the dogs out this morning and found Freddie Lounds car on my property, I poked around but didn’t actually find her…” he trailed off, awkward and unsure. Jack swore.

“No sign of her anywhere?”

“I only checked the path between the service road and my house and the bank of the river but no, it’s a big property.”

“Dammit, okay stay put, I’ll send some uniforms out.”

“Thanks Jack,”

He was pleasant through the entire ordeal, worried but not too overbearing as cops combed through the woods around his house. There was nothing to find, her bones were in the gorge, her clothes burned and discarded, the rest in the freezer.

It was past dinner by the time the officers left and towed her car away and Will smiled as he prepared his dinner along with his dogs. Her tape recorder sat on the dining room table, he listened back to it, her ‘evidence’ was circumstantial at best, never would have stood up in court. He grinned unapologetic before smashing it apart and throwing it out.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The disappearance of Freddie Lounds was a quietly celebrated affair at the BAU.

Will was questioned, perfunctory, but the fact that he property was almost a hundred acres rife with dangerous terrain and a roiling river made it pretty easy to determine that Lounds, in her attempt to bother Will, took a wrong step and was lost. Most people would express their condolences for the loss then smile quietly, secretly, nobody particularly liked Lounds so any push to search more was dismissed with a perfunctory pity.

Will tried not to revel in his pride at the kill, for how impulsive it was it worked out quite well for him. He knew it was not a performance he could repeat, more than one disappearance on his property would start to cause problems.

Nonetheless, with her out of the picture the FBI would have a much easier time keeping cases quiet so really Will should be thanked.

The kill couldn't have come at a better time as four days later the Chesapeake Ripper dropped a body. Will saw the scene, a middle aged man hanging upside down, sand pouring from his mouth like a demented hourglass. It was as beautiful and spotless as ever and Will spent more time than strictly necessary admiring the craftsmanship.

That admiration turned to a mild annoyance when two more bodies dropped within a month and Will found himself chained to his desk as he looked through the same case files over and over again.

The Ripper cases were unique, they were art, elevation of swine to sculptures of Grecian proportions. He could probably give Jack more, Give him leads to catch the man, but he didn't want to, the Ripper was the only killer that didn't fill his head with noise and anger and his nose with filth. So many killers clamored at his psyche, fevered and chaotic, gave him nightmares, made him feel brittle and inhuman. When he stepped into a Ripper kill it was like slipping into a cool, still pool of water, calm and refreshing, his mind was like ice and mirror, impenetrable but so very beautiful.

Will was not stupid enough to try and find the man, the Ripper didn't seem to be a pack hunter, but he could admire from afar, keep people off his back, respect for a fellow predator and all.

Still, the saturation of kills was a little ridiculous and Will's sleep schedule was suffering for it. The only saving grace was the Collector seemed to have disappeared for the time being so Will only had one serial killer to work on.

Sandman was first, missing a few key organs, next came a pair of women curled together beneath a barren tree like a baroque painting, both missing a leg. The last kill was called in

early in the morning, Will hadn't had a chance to even leave Quantico so he made it to the scene before the general buzz. In his exhaustion he could only stare at the scene in awe, annoyance forgotten at the tableau in front of him.

The person was almost genderless, smooth and pale and long limbed, their waist wrapped in lengths of white and blue cloth that shimmered in the early morning light. They were unblemished, bloodless and clean, their head was tilted back, eyes foggy and unseeing. There was what appeared to be fur, white as snow, draped over their shoulders and down their back. Will moved closer and realized that no, the fur was not draped over them, it was part of them, the skin had been removed from their back and carefully replaced with fur, neat, tiny stitches almost hidden by the strands of fur. It was beautiful, radiant, an elegy.

His revere was broken by Jack and once again he was forced to go through his song and dance of placating, confusion and being belittled until Jack gave up and Will was allowed to return to Quantico, he gave the pale skin and white fur one last look before leaving the scene behind.

He'd just made it back to his desk when his phone rang and he felt a tinge of panic when he saw it was Hannibal, he took a deep breath and answered.

"Graham"

"Will."

"Dr. Lecter."

"How goes the hunt."

"Slow, frustrating, there uh- there was a new body this morning, you didn't hear that from me."

"My lips are sealed, though with the loss of that dreadful reporter has probably made it easier to keep crime scenes contained."

Will hummed, "I guess, did you need something?"

"Yes, I was calling to see if you would attend a dinner party I am hosting this Saturday."

"Oh", he wasn't sure how he felt about that, dinner with Hannibal was nice, meeting any of Hannibal's followers seemed like a nightmare, "I- well work is kinda hell right now."

"I'm sure you could take an evening off, Jack can only keep you locked up for so long."

"I guess, I'm not very good with people, probably going to embarrass you."

"Impossible, it would take quite a bit for me to feel embarrassed and it would never be because of you."

"We'll see about that, what time?" Fuck it, worst case he could fake a work thing and run.

“6pm.”

“Should I bring anything?”

“Just yourself is perfect. I will see you then, good luck with your murderer.”

“Thank you, goodbye Dr. Lecter.”

“Goodbye darling.”

Will managed to beg off of work early on Saturday and had enough time to go back to Wolf Trap and shower. He’d caved the day before and bought an actual dress shirt, nothing fancy, it was a dark green and he had black dress pants, he just hoped it would be enough. His dress shoes were rarely worn and hurt his feet but he was pretty sure Hannibal would not appreciate him showing up in tennis shoes.

The drive back to Baltimore was snowy and slick and he made it just shy of 6 o’clock. There were already a few cars parked along the driveway so Will parked a street over, mostly so he didn’t have to see his beat up truck beside the row of luxury cars.

He could hear a light chatter from inside the house and the smell of perfume and wine was strong even from the driveway. Will adjusted his shirt nervously, wiped his hands and knocked on the door.

He was let in by what must have been a waiter who took his coat and ushered him into the fancy sitting room he’d seen a few times. There were a few people already, dressed to the nines much to Will’s dismay and in the center, like a sun and its orbit, was Hannibal. He was opulent as ever, a tuxedo fit perfectly to his broad frame and his hair coiffed perfectly. The man seemed to shine surrounded by so many clamoring for his attention.

He glanced up at Will’s entrance and gave him a genuine smile, his eyes were dark as he looked Will over and Will swallowed hard as the man approached.

“William, I’m glad you were able to attend, I worried you would be withheld.”

Will gave him a shrug, “hard to be withheld when you don’t really ask to leave.”

That earned him a quiet laugh, the other guests began to gather, clearly interested in this newcomer so different from them in his cheap clothes and wild hair. He recognized one woman from the opera, the rest were new.

Hannibal graciously introduced him to the other guests and a waiter brought him a glass of wine. He avoided mingling as much as possible, sticking to the edge and staring at paintings whenever Hannibal went off to greet people. Surprisingly, the man stayed with him much longer than he had stayed with anyone else and seemed to steer Will around the room as he chatted and primped at all his guests.

Dinner was called promptly at seven and Will found himself sitting to Hannibal's right with an older woman to his right and a portly middle aged man directly across from him.

The food was served in the most lavish way possible and Will held in the urge to laugh as the other guests clapped for Hannibal for an entire minute, Will played along for the first ten seconds or so then stopped, instead opting to watch Hannibal as he preened under the attention. The applause ends, people reclaim their seats and food is served, it smelled divine, seared meat and rich sauce blending with the cacophony of perfume and cologne to overdrive Will's nose almost to the point of distraction. He tried to pick out Hannibal's scent under it all to focus himself and took a bite.

The appetizer was bits of meat and cheese and fruit on fancy skewers and a little bowl of sauce for dipping, it was sweet and rich and Will enjoyed it while he listened to the others simper at Hannibal over the food. Will stayed quiet, Hannibal knew he liked his food and Will wasn't one for fawning.

The course was quickly replaced by a second and Will shouldn't have been surprised that the braised lamb leg was actually human. It was rich, whoever it was had a good diet and tasted robust and healthy. The light chatter continued around him, someone asked what the stuffing was, Hannibal said some insane combination that included heart and liver and Will watched his eyes burn as everyone ate and oh…

Oh fuck.

Hannibal was meticulous, controlled, used to be a surgeon, ate human flesh; Will stared at his plate of not-lamb leg and remembered the two women missing legs, the man with no liver or kidneys, the furred person missing only their heart.

Hannibal was the fucking Chesapeake Ripper.

Will was suddenly grateful for the fawning idiots around him that pulled Hannibal's attention, his revelation ripped the air from his lungs and fear warred with some weird feeling of relief and left him dizzy and breathless.

He wiped his mouth and excused himself quietly, trying not to shiver as Hannibal's eyes tracked him out of the room. The bathroom was small and dim and Will laid his face against the cool porcelain of the sink for a moment and tried to gather himself.

Hannibal was the Ripper, the source of Will's semi fanatical interest and the FBI's biggest manhunt. He didn't know why he never saw it before, why he didn't see it at the first meal, he'd grown so used to the Ripper being this untouchable, inhuman being he could not equate him to the man he'd grown to admire in such a short time. It made so much sense though, puzzle pieces slotting together now that Will could see the whole table.

For one singular moment he considered calling Jack, thought of a SWAT team bursting into this extravagant party and arresting Hannibal in his bespoke suit and immediately dismissed it. Knowing Hannibal was the Chesapeake Ripper didn't change his opinions on either of them, he liked Hannibal too much to lose him and respected the Ripper too much to cross him.

If anything his feelings swelled beyond a tentative interest to *obsession* knowing that Hannibal was a monster, a predator like him, maybe not exactly like him but if any one could survive truly knowing Will it would be him.

He splashed his face with cool water, straightened his shirt, willed his dick to chill out and returned to the table.

Hannibal gave him a slight head tilt when he returned but he waved him off with a smile. Dinner continued without anything of interest, the other guests seemed to find Will uninteresting and largely ignored him which suited him just fine.

He fought not to simply stare at Hannibal the entire time and mentally swung between being wildly horny and massively annoyed he had to be patient. The doctor seemed to know something was up as he continued to give Will questioning glances through the remaining courses and into coffee and dessert.

Instead of answering Will brushed Hannibal's leg with his own, a slow sensual drag before returning to his crepe, he could feel the fire in Hannibal's eyes without even having to look and reveled in the effect he had on such a stoic man.

After dinner was done the guests were all ushered back into the sitting room and given champagne. Hannibal glued himself to Will for the remainder of the evening, occasionally stroking over his back and his waistband as he chatted with his ever more intoxicated guests.

Eventually, *finally* the guests began to trickle out, offering lunches and meetings and golf trips to Hannibal as they stumbled to their taxis and cars. Will stayed back, aware of his possible overstep but too strung out to care, he watched as Hannibal showed the last guest to the door and took his wine into the study to build a fire.

When Hannibal found him he was laid out on the chaise, sipping the dredges on his wine. The man stripped his coat and bowtie off before settling beside Will, drawing his legs over his lap.

"Did you enjoy yourself?"

Will hummed, "Food was great, company was… company." Hannibal smiled at him.

"You played your part admirably."

"I did literally nothing."

"Exactly." Hannibal smiled at him and slid a hand under Will's pant leg. They sat in silence for a while, Hannibal's hands wandering and Will contemplating. Eventually the want to have and consume outweighed Wills desire to be 'safe' and he set his wine glass on the side table and turned to Hannibal.

"I'm going to tell you something, but you can't ask any questions and I will not be elaborating."

Hannibal nodded, easy acquisition making Will feel warm inside.

“I want you,” he took a deep breath and forced the rest out, “I want you but I am going to hurt you if I have you and I don’t want to hurt you.”

If Hannibal was startled by the statement he didn’t show it, rather he watched Will quietly for a few moments before nodding again.

“Alright, I will not argue if that is what you believe.” Will felt disappointment at what felt like a rejection, Hannibal cradled his face with an assessing look. “If I were to bind you would that make you feel safer?”

That got him, Will sucked in a breath and stared at the man, would it? He was strong, but being bound might prevent him from acting before he could think about it, which would give Hannibal time to move away. The thought of being bound, helpless like he hadn’t been in years made him feel like an inferno.

“Yes, but you have to gag me.” Hannibal grinned at him and nodded before leaving him for a few moments. He returned with a length of red rope and a scarf, Will scoffed.

“You just have bondage gear laying around.”

“I’m not one to limit my indulgences, if I want something I’ll have it.”

Will held in another laugh at the secondary truth behind the statement. “Fair enough.”

Hannibal settled back beside him, he set the ropes aside and reached for Will, pulling him into a bruising kiss as he unbuttoned his shirt and slid it from his shoulders.

The fire had grown and cast the room in orange light, Will could feel the heat on his bare back as Hannibal nipped and sucked at his neck. After a few minutes he pulled back and retrieved the rope, he directed Will to turn around and began to methodically tie his arms behind his back in tight loops. The rope was smooth but firm as it tied his wrists to his opposite elbow and pushed his back into a gentle bow. Hannibal was efficient but gentle and Will let himself settle into the feeling.

When he finished on his arms Hannibal rolled the scarf into a long rope and put it gently between Will's teeth, kissing his temple as he tied a secure knot at the nape of his neck. Will mourned the fact he wouldn’t be able to kiss the man but reveled in the opportunity to indulge without fear of hurting someone.

Hannibal settled Will back against the cushion of the chaise and removed his own shirt before bodily hauling Will into his lap and dear god was it hot. He ran his fingers reverently over the ropes before settling them low on Will’s hips.

“Too tight?” he murmured, Will shook his head, “good.”

With that he closed in like a shark and Will found himself subsumed by the man, he groaned low in his throat when Hannibal pulled him tight and returned his mouth to Will’s neck and pushed a thigh higher between his legs. Pleasure thrummed and Will melted into it, straining at the ropes trapping his arms behind him.

“So beautiful, *vilkas* , relax, just feel for me.” Hannibal rumbled in his ear as his hand slipped down between them and undid Will’s pants, allowing him to get better fiction as he rolled into Hannibal's taunt stomach. The sound that bubbled out of him was barely human and his eyes burned, faintly he knew they must have shifted but he couldn’t gather himself enough to shift them back so he just shoved his face into Hannibal’s neck.

“Hannibal.” He moaned as the man gripped his hips and drove Will forward harder, spiking the pleasure up his spine like hot iron, the name garbled behind the gag.

“Feeling good? Is this what you wanted? Needed to be contained so you could let go.”

It wasn’t really a question but Will nodded anyway, this was everything, the urge under his skin driven back by the rope around his arms and the silk in his mouth.

He could feel that Hannibal was hard beneath him and he ground down into his, drawing a muted grunt from the man, he celebrated the sound for just a moment before moaning, high and reedy when Hannibal stuck a hang inside his pants and circled him in a borderline painful grip. The man started at a frustratingly slow pace as he murmured praise to Will and traced his skin with his other hand.

Will couldn’t move, couldn’t escape the pleasure encompassing him as he writhed and moaned under Hannibal’s expert hands. He was barely aware when he reached his end, too lost in his instincts and the sound of Hannibal’s blood pounding under his skin. He wanted to bite, to taste his blood, Hannibal’s steel grip on the ropes around his arms kept him away from his neck as he worked Will faster, pushing him closer and closer to the edge.

He was making a continuous, whining sound as he wiggled and humped, his mouth strained at the gag but Hannibal gave him no leeway and finally he tumbled over the edge with a whiny sob.

It took him a while to come back, slowly regaining feeling in his extremities. He realized he’d been untied and the gag was removed and he was laying half on Hannibal’s lap staring at the fire. The man was petting through Will’s hair and Will could feel that he was still hard beneath his collar bone.

“Mmmh, sorry, d’want..” he trailed off, too out of it still to articulate his thoughts. Hannibal hummed.

“I am more than satisfied, *vilkas,* just rest. You can sleep in the guest room tonight.”

Will was too content to argue so he just dug his face into Hannibal's thigh and drifted on the rush of endorphins, between the warmth from the fire and the gentle hand in his hair Will was dead asleep in minutes.

The next day finds Will back at Quantico flipping through Ripper files after a very nice morning spent with Hannibal. He’d awoken in an unfamiliar guest room in only his

undershirt and boxers and spent a few minutes internally panicking before finally giving in to the smell of bacon and trudging downstairs.

Breakfast had been pleasant, easy, Hannibal plying him with coffee and eggs before shuffling him out the door so they could both get to work.

The warm fuzzy feeling had evaporated after a chilly drive and a less than motivating meeting with Jack and he was once again annoyed with his entire job. It felt particularly fruitless now that he *knew* the Ripper so the search was entirely pointless. Instead he spent a few hours searching through case files and subtly removing anything that would bring them too close to Hannibal.

He realized somewhere around lunch that the skinned woman was for him, a one up on the serial killer that had been occupying Will's mind at the time and tried to consolidate the fact that Hannibal was trying to flirt with him through murder. It should not have made him horny, he called the man over lunch anyways.

By early afternoon he ran out of Ripper related things to look at and returned to the Collector. Flipping through the book gave him very little other than some potential locations on his final kill. Frustrated, he looked up the publishing company of the book and tried calling them. No one answered, it was a Sunday he conceded, so he left a message and returned to his hunt.

He made a list of past owners of the houses bodies had been found in and people who had access to the pool, motel and Bonatoro before giving up for the day and returning to Wolf Trap before the snow got any worse.

The next day saw a freak storm that stranded him in Wolf Trap as the roads were impassable. He decided to do some maintenance he'd been putting off, fixing door hinges and a leaky faucet before taking the dogs out for a very snowy hike.

He was making a late lunch when he got a call from an unfamiliar number. He sighed but answered anyway.

"Hello?"

"Hi, is this umm- Will Graham."

"Speaking."

"Hello this is Paxton Smith with Bar and Shield Publishing, we received a message from you yesterday?"

Will sprung up and immediately went for his bag. "Yes! Thank you for getting back to me, I was wondering if you could find some information on a book you published."

"I can certainly try, do you have the title and publishing year?"

He gave her the information, sitting quietly as he clicked and hummed for a few minutes.

“Alright so from what I can see this was the only book published under this name, the author used a pseudonym.”

“Do you have the author's real name by chance?”

“We should, let’s see… looks like it was a Jeremiah Oxendale.”

“Do you have an address for him?”

“Doesn’t seem like it, no contact information either.”

“Okay, that’s alright. Thank you for your help.”

They said their goodbyes and hung up, Will texted Jack the name and stuck in in the case file before going back to his lunch.

The storm held out for two days and it took another for the roads to be cleared enough for Will to risk driving back to Baltimore. The break was godsend but meant Jack was cracking the whip twice as hard after the lost time. The second Will walked into the office Jack was shoving a file in his hands.

“Find the author.”

“It might not be him.”

“Well then that’s one less person to check.”

The day dragged on, Hannibal called him over the lunch hour and invited him for dinner that night and the thought of curling in the study with a full stomach made it a million times harder to sit in his musty and cold office searching for ghosts.

There was very little to find on Jerimiah Oxendale, no social media, no record, he barely existed, nothing to connect him to any of the victims. He had all but abandoned Jerimiah as a lead when he glanced over his file again and saw the adoption certificate.

The last name was different, he’d been adopted for a few years by a Mrs. Culloden before he turned eighteen and changed his last name back to Oxendale. Will punched in ‘Jeremiah Culloden’ and frowned when nothing came up, he paused for a minute then shot up to grab the stack of case files from Beverly’s desk, locating the first victim and sitting back down.

Liam Culloden, found dead in a basement, a crime of passion, the first kill. Survived by his mother, a fiancee, and an estranged step brother.

“Holy shit.” Will whispered, scooping up the two files and charging down the hallway. Jack wasn’t in his office, he realized almost everyone was already gone and he felt a sliver of dread when he noticed it was past nine and he had three missed calls from Hannibal.

He swore and gathered his things, leaving the files on his desk as he dialed Jack. It went to voicemail.

“Jack, call me when you get this, I found the connection, it’s the author, he’s our killer.” He hung up and dialed Hannibal.

“Will.”

“Hi sorry, I'm so sorry I got caught up, I’m coming now, if you still want me to.”

“Of course, I held dinner for you.”

Will smiled despite the guilt. “You didn’t have to do that.”

“I wanted to.”

They said goodbye as Will reached his car and he shoved his phone away. The drive was slow and snowy and he cursed his ancient truck as he drifted down the road, half freezing with his malfunctioning heater. He’d made it halfway there when he saw a car spun into the ditch with the lights blinking and cursed his luck.

The snow was getting heavier as he parked his truck and trudged over to the car, calling out for the driver. There was no answer, the driver's door was propped open and the engine was running and Will took a deep breath trying to locate the smell of human over the frozen oxygen smell of the snow.

He ducked his head to look into the car and noticed a strange helmet on the passenger seat before he heard the snow crunch behind him. He managed a half turn before pain bloomed along his head and he collapsed.

The ground was frigid under his knees as he struggled to stay up right and he couldn’t help the warning that rumbled out of his chest. His attacker circled around him and Will got a glimpse of black hair and glasses before a second strike hooked his temple and everything went black.

When Will managed to come back to himself he was laid on his back in a puddle of snow, it soaked through his coat and jeans and he was shivering even before he was fully conscious. The pain in his head was throbbing and sharp, better than it would have been if he was human, he healed much faster nowadays. Subtly he wiggled his fingers and toes and found he wasn’t tied up, maybe a good sign, maybe a very bad one.

He remembered stopping to investigate a crashed car and realized it was probably a ruse. Hopefully it was just so they could steal his truck and he was currently laying beside the road but his luck had never really been that good.

Focusing felt like dragging himself out of a pit of tar but after a few long moments he managed to collect his mind enough to spread his senses and assess his surroundings. Snow, his own blood, and chlorine? It was faint, masked by the snow but yes, chlorine, plastic and old blood. With a sinking feeling of dread Will cracked his eye and confirmed exactly where he was.

The pool, the one where they found their first victim, Will knew immediately what was happening and decided playing dead wasn't going to help.

He leveraged himself up and looked around, immediately landing on the figure waiting for him. The man was tall, broad, dressed in a workman's jacket and jeans. He stood perfectly still, like a soldier at rest and presumably staring at Will. It was hard to tell though, he was wearing a helmet, some replica knights helmet with a face shield and everything and Will almost laughed at the absurdity.

Jeremiah shifted subtly as Will climbed to his feet, his hands were clasped in front of him and he had what seemed like a giant hunting knife on his hip.

"Jeremiah…" Will started, knowing it was pointless, "My name is Will Graham, whatever you think I am, whoever you think you are, it's not real."

He didn't respond at first, shifting a bit before drawing himself up. Finally he spoke.

"For the final gift, the stone heart of Bathalaraz, the great wolf." He spoke softly but with a confidence that belied how far gone he was.

"Your name is Jeremiah Oxendale, my name is Will Graham, I am not the great wolf, you're sick, you need help."

" *No,"* he pulled his shoulders back, "I *saw you,* I saw you hunt, eat, I know your nature. With this final gift she will see me, she will lay a hand upon my brow and weep at the great deed I have done."

Will faltered for a moment, had he seen? He thought back to when he thought he was being watched on his last hunt. Jeremiah didn't smell like anything, he wouldn't have caught his scent when he was searching, sickness sometimes made people almost null in scent. Well that complicated the talk down.

"Jeremiah…"

The man drew his knife and stepped forward. "The heart of Bathalaraz, the head of the great dragon, the eyes of the Gordavenchi," he was chanting now, advancing forward, he drew a bottle from his belt. "the ribs of Cercis, teeth of the serpent and the golden coat of the Balangaia, the gifts of the gods. A sacred sign of the truest of love."

Will shuffled back, his gun was gone.

"Jeremiah, you are sick, this is not real."

The man paused for a moment, tilting his head.

"I'm sorry, it'll be over quick." With that he lunged.

Chapter End Notes

🙃

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

hello i am sorry, ive been insanely busy with Uni
slight content warning for more people getting eaten alive
enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will could count on one hand the amount of times he'd been scared in his life, not nervous or frightened, but jaw locked, ice-in-your-chest terrified.

The first time was in his youth when his father got to drunk and too mad and Will had believed that night he was going to die, the second was in his second month on the force, a wrecked car on a bridge, a young woman unconscious inside, Will too late, helpless as it tipped over the edge into the river. The third, the worst, was the Incident, that night in the swamp that left him scarred and changed.

He'd been sent out with his partner, an older man with a one year chip in his pocket and another on his shoulder, multiple reports of dogs going missing in one area, a homeless man then two teenage boys. The cops believed it was a coincidence but sent people out anyway, they'd pulled up to an abandoned shed half shrunken into the swamp and poked around.

Will had walked down the shore while the other cop checked the shed, it was dark, hot and sticky and he'd been thinking of just dunking his head in the murky water when he heard something rumble, horrible and low then a cut off shout.

He'd run back to the shed, gun clutched awkwardly against his flashlight, he'd found his partner on the ground, torn apart and half alive, moaning and gurgling. The thing crouched over him was not something Will could explain, even now in its skin. It looked like a dog at first, but it was wrong, its fur grew into jagged spikes along its spine and its head was crested in feathers, it had looked up when the light hit it and Will had frozen.

The flash light had clattered to the ground along with Will's gun and he'd stared frozen as the creature began growling again and stalked over its prey towards him, Will had run but didn't make it far. The pain started sharp and hot in his shoulder where the creature bit down and expanded into an inferno when it tore away as Will fell.

He'd waited to be torn apart, to die screaming in the swamp, a forgotten stray like his father always called him. Nothing came though, it had stood over him for a moment, its breath like a bellow on his back, then it returned to the shed, to its meal. Will lay there, delirious in pain and listened to it eat before shock and blood loss dragged him under. He'd been found the

next morning and the rest was history but that was the last time he had ever felt real true animal fear, the last time he had felt like prey.

Standing there now, soaked and battered, he thought he should maybe feel afraid, but it never really came.

He shifted his stance as Jeremiah pulled a bottle from his coat and tossed the contents at Will, he threw an arm up, the burn of acid didn't hit though, rather just the cold of water on his already chilled skin. The bottle clattered to the ground and Will stared at it mildly baffled.

"Did you just throw holy water at me?" he asked, why did he always end up with the crazy ones? The killer made no indication he heard Will, he was chanting, low and reverberating inside his helmet, his knife was still in his hand and he advanced on Will once again. For a few dragging moments it was a dance, Will backing around the pool, staying out of range as Jeremiah stalked after him, unbreaking and determined.

He was strong and assured and if Will had been human he would have been much more worried about his odds. The desire to just shift, to rip the man apart was strong but it was a bad idea, if the cops showed up too soon he'd be trapped in a fish bowl with no way out. Plus he'd have no way to explain how their murderer had been torn to shreds in an abandoned swimming pool with Will unarmed and injured.

He was weaker and more vulnerable in this form and Jeremiah was proving to be an admirable opponent. One wrong step put Will on the back foot when the other struck out and Will had to throw himself under the man's arm to avoid his knife, he barely made a half turn when he slipped on the snow and was too slow to avoid the knife arcing up and into his ribs. The sound that wrenched out of him was far from human and he could feel his vision sharpening as his instincts surged stronger in a bid to protect him.

He pulled away sharply and snarled when the knife tore free, he backed up to get some space and tried to gather himself, he could feel blood running down his ribs and soaking into his jeans, it wouldn't kill him but it would slow him down. This needed to end now or Will would have no choice but to use his advantage.

The killer seemed unphased, he wiped the blade of his knife on his jeans and moved forward once again. Will held his place this time, waiting until Jeremiah got close, he'd moved predictably up until this point, broad, controlled motions, strong but slow. He swung the knife up, Will blocked with his forearm and shoved back, he kicked out at the man's knee to throw him off balance. Jeremiah stumbled slightly but regained his footing and came at Will again.

Will swore, irritated and in pain and when the knife came up again he shot out and grabbed the man's wrist and bent it back hard, the snap was low and muffled and the chanting cut out with a grunt of pain, the knife clattered to the ground and Will dove for it.

He cried out when a boot drove into his ribs but he pushed on, grabbing the knife and scuttling back like a crab on all fours. Jeremiah advanced on him, and Will tried to get his feet under him but failed, dizzy and cold, instead he waited until he was within reaching distance and threw himself forward at the man's knees, they went down, the helmet hitting the frozen concrete with a resounding thud.

Will had lost the knife and was too scattered to go back for it so he crawled onto Jeremiah's chest and wrenched the helmet free. The man punched out at him but he was obviously stunned, he was still stronger and Will jerked back when a l ucky hit hooked his jaw and split his lip across his teeth. He grit his teeth and held position, Jeremiah stared up at him, his eyes glassy and hyper focused as he tried to wrestle himself free.

Will grabbed at his hair, a continuous, angry growl rattling through his battered chest as he dragged the killer's head up and slammed it against the concrete once, twice and a third time before he finally stopped moving and sagged. Will sat on his stomach a moment longer, panting and stunned. He was hurt, angry and freezing and was a little annoyed that his first thought was of Hannibal's study.

All of his things were missing from his pockets so he couldn't call anyone, the pool ladder was missing and he was too exhausted to pull himself out, it was late, getting colder and Will could barely gather himself enough to bind Jermiah's hands behind his back with his own shoelaces and shove the knife in the back of his jeans.

He slumped against the curved edge of the pool, the blood had grown cold where it soaked into his pants and his mind was murky. He'd just rest for a moment, then he'd figure out how to get out and call for help, just a moment though, just rest his eyes…

The flashing of lights and the hum of voices dragged him from his sleep, he was frozen, sore and muddy. He groaned as he shifted sideways but wasn't able to drag himself out of his slump. The voices were coming from above him which was weird, he was too tired to really figure it out though. A thud somewhere to his left and suddenly someone was pulling him up.

"Will! Hey, come on, wake up."

He groaned as the movement made him very aware of the stab wound in his side and batted weakly at Jack's hands.

"F'nd the killer." he muttered.

"Looks like he found you first. Where are you injured?" Jack asked as he pulled at Will's coat and shirt.

"Side, stabbed, h't my head." He heard the other man swear then shout for the medics.

"Jack, there's no ladder," that felt important, he started to sag sideways and Jack dragged him back up.

"We'll get a ladder, you just stay awake."

Will nodded, he didn't really think he could, he closed his eyes despite Jack's shouting and let himself drift back to sleep.

The next time he surfaced he was somewhat warmer, he was dry at least but the air was cool on his bare chest. He was inside, a steady beep and the smell of antiseptic told him he was

probably in the hospital. His eyes were gummy and sore but he managed to peel them open enough to see around himself, the lights were dim and he could see the sun rising so it had to have been only a few hours, or an entire day which was concerning.

There was a chair beside his bed, recently vacated, going by the coat and the cup of coffee. He could smell Jack and his own blood so he assumed that's who it was. He closed his eyes again and let himself drift for a bit, whatever painkillers he'd been given were strong and he felt untethered and murky.

A vague sense of panic washed over him when he realized he had never made it to Hannibal's house, that the man probably waited for hours with no word and it was dawn now. He cracked his eyes open again and tried to locate his phone but it wasn't anywhere near his bed. Maybe they hadn't found it, he wasn't sure if it had been in his car or in his pocket, he regretted making the man worry.

His eyes had slipped closed again when he heard heavy tread in the hallway and the door opening with a quiet squeal. Jack settled back into the chair beside him with a sigh and Will gave himself thirty seconds to lay there before he shifted around, groaned and opened his eyes.

Jack jumped up again and came closer to the bed.

"Will? Take it slow."

"Did you get him?" he hadn't been sure if the killer was still there when the cops showed up, presumably he would have been dead and heartless if he'd made his escape.

"We got him, broken wrist and a nasty concussion but he'll be fit for trial."

"How'd you find me?"

"We got a call about your truck being found and no one could get a hold of you, I heard your voicemail and had a feeling it was connected, sent squads to all the previous drop sites, we got lucky."

Will nodded, tried to order his thoughts, "he wrote the book, was in love with his brother's fiance, did they- you should find her." He tried to push himself up and Jack helped him, showing a pillow behind his spine.

"You said he knew the first victim?" Jack prompted, his eyes serious, Will fought the urge to smile, even laid out in the hospital with the killer behind bars Jack needed to know, needed to understand.

"Step brother, or I guess foster brother is more accurate, they weren't close, his fiance was a childhood friend, highschool sweetheart, Jeremiah coveted her, when he found out Liam had proposed he snapped, didn't think he'd earned it."

"So he killed him and set out to woo her himself."

Will nodded.

“Why’d he target you?”

He shrugged, “it’s hard to say why he targeted any of them, the last was a wolf that lived in a forest, I live in the woods, maybe he was watching me.”

Jack shook his head, “well we’ll need your report but you earned a few days to rest.”

“Do you have my phone?” Jack nodded and left for a moment, he came back and handed Will his phone before leaving to go get the doctor.

Will turned the phone on and cringed at the stack of missed calls and texts, mostly from Jack and Beverly but scrolling back the first few were from Hannibal. He read through the texts before dialing the man, he spared a single thought to how early it was but was quickly derailed when Hannibal picked up on the third ring.

“Will? Are you alright?” He sounded calm but there was a thread to his voice, a tension that belied his nerves.

“Hi, I'm sorry there was an incident, I’m alright, sorta.”
“Did something happen with your killer? Are you at work then?”

“Yes and no, we found him, or he found me I guess, I’m at the hospital.”

“Are you injured?”

“A bit…” he hedged. He heard Hannibal sigh over the line.

“I’m on my way.”

“What? No, it's fine, I'll probably be released in a few hours.”

“Then you will presumably need a ride home, yes?”

“I can drive.”

Hannibal only hummed, “I will be there soon, *vilkas.”* He hung up before Will could protest more.

He groaned, the pain medication had begun to wear off and he was sore and exhausted and wanted to go home.

Jack came back in a few minutes later with a woman in tow, she came forward with a clipboard and a gentle smile.

“Hello, Mr. Graham, good to see you awake, how do you feel?”

He shrugged, “sore, bit dizzy.”

She nodded and wrote something down, “to be expected, you have quite the concussion but the wound on your side is fairly superficial, mostly muscle damage. You’ll have to take it

slow for a week or so but it should heal well."

"Does that mean I can leave?" he asked, the smell of the hospital was overwhelming and he wanted to be home with his pack and the quiet of the woods.

"Do you have someone who can stay with you? You will need to be watched for signs that your concussion is worsening and you can't be driving or moving your right arm too much."

Will felt the knee jerk want to just lie, say he could stay with his neighbour, he was planning on doing just that when the door behind him opened and Hannibal walked in. Jack and the doctor turned with a frown but Hannibal paid them no mind.

"Darling, this doesn't look like 'a bit' to me." He stroked the side of Will's face gently then turned back to the others in the room. "My apologies, Hannibal Lecter."

Jack shook his hand with a frown. "I don't believe we've met."

Hannibal smiled thinly at him, "not in person, we spoke on the phone about my patient."

The connection seemed to click but before Jack could continue Hannibal turned to the doctor.

"I will be staying with Will while he recuperates," the woman smiled and steered him away, presumably to relay the same instructions again. Jack turned back to Will.

"Did you know him before the Carmicheal case?" Will shook his head.

"I interviewed him, left it at that, we ran into each other again a few weeks after the case was closed."

Jack was unhappy but didn't push the issue, he gave Will a loose pat on the shoulder and told him he'd call before leaving. Hannibal was still talking to the doctor but Will tuned them out and laid back.

He very carefully didn't think of the fact that Hannibal would be in his house, would see where he lived, would presumably be there for days. He almost laughed at the thought of the man trying to cook in his dinky little kitchen. Apparently he'd drifted more than he'd thought because he was startled when a warm hand smoothed over his forehead and pushed his hair back.

"Will? I've signed your release," Hannibal murmured, Will cracked an eye but nodded anyway, the doctor had left but a nurse replaced her.

"Alright Mr. Graham, I have some painkillers and antibiotics for you then we can get you changed."

Will grimaced but accepted the pills and the stack of clothing, his had been discarded apparently. Thankfully it was Hannibal who helped him change into the loose sweats and t-shirt before bundling him into his own coat. He shoved his feet into his boots and let himself be guided into a wheelchair. They made it into the car with little fuss and the drugs had taken

effect so it was only a few minutes after Will was laid back in the passenger seat that he drifted off to sleep.

Hannibal woke Will when they made it to Wolf Trap, he helped him from the car and into the house before returning to his car to retrieve a duffle bag and what looked like a few grocery bags.

“When did you buy groceries?” Will asked from his nest on the couch as Hannibal unloaded the bags in the kitchen.

“I stopped while you were sleeping, I had a feeling whatever store was nearest to here wouldn’t be up to my standards.”

Will snorted but said nothing, he had slept the entire drive and then some apparently but was still exhausted.

“You can go back to sleep Will, I’ll wake you when lunch is ready.” Hannibal came over to adjust his blankets and brush his hair from his face and Will closed his eyes, no longer fighting the urge to sleep. The day passed in the same manner, Will drifting in and out of sleep while Hannibal puttered and fed him, he’d tried to get up once to feed the dogs but was stopped with a kiss and a hand on his sternum before Hannibal fed them and took them out for a run.

It was nice, domestic, Will wanted to cling to the sensation but knew it would pass as soon as he was well enough. Nonetheless he settled into the doting and let himself enjoy it while it happened.

The second day was largely the same, except now Will was awake and massively annoyed at being trapped on his couch. Hannibal had slept over, waking Will every few hours to check him for worsening symptoms and yet the man was still as polished and regal as ever even on barely any sleep.

Will had tried three separate times to get up and do something, every time he’d been caught, kissed and returned to the couch. It was rolling around to dinner time when he made his fourth attempt. He gathered up a quilt and a book before marching out onto the porch to sit on the bench. It was frigid and he was underdressed and aching but he stubbornly settled on the worn wood anyways and tried to focus on his book. Hannibal came out less than five minutes later with a mild exasperation.

“Will.”

“Hannibal.”

Silence held for a few moments before Hannibal sighed and went back inside. He returned with a second blanket and socks which he put on Will before bundling him in the second blanket and settled beside him.

“You won’t heal if you don’t rest.”

“I am resting.”

“Is it being idle that bothers you or being reliant on someone else?”

“Don’t psychoanalyze me, Dr. Lecter.”

“That isn’t an answer *vilkas.”*

“You keep calling me that, what does it mean?”

Hannibal just smiled, patted him on the knee and went back inside. Will managed to maintain his stubborn determination for ten minutes before he grew too cold and stiff and was forced to shuffle back inside. Hannibal was making dinner at that point so he settled into a kitchen chair to watch him rather than returning to the couch.

The house was warm and smelled like bread, Hannibal had made a loaf from scratch and Will hadn’t eaten half of it before Hannibal could put it away. He laid his head on the worn dining table and watched Hannibal as he moved around, so confident even in someone else’s kitchen. Will picked at his split lip until it bled again, the smell of blood layered with bread and Hannibal and home was intoxicating, all he ever wanted. This was all he wanted, a home, a pack, someone to care for and to care for him, he wanted, but was so scared to grab lest this all dissolved away.

The only way to find out would be to try but how exactly does one tell the man they are in love with that they’re a monstrous wolf thing that hunts people and eats them alive. To be fair if anyone would take it well it would be the Chesapeake Ripper, that was a whole other thing though, he knew what Hannibal was capable of, he couldn’t tell Hannibal he knew without revealing his own habits. It was a lot, he was so tired, didn’t want to deal with any of it. He needed a hunt, something he wouldn’t get until he healed and Hannibal returned home.

A hand brushed through his hair and helped him sit back, a plate was slid in front of him along with his little cup of pills before Hannibal settled beside him. They ate quietly for a bit, Will spinning his thoughts over and over until he felt them bubble over without his consent.

“You asked about my scars, how I got them.”

Hannibal looked up at them, “you told me it was a monster.”

“Yes, I… I want to tell you, you’re not going to believe me, but I want you to know.”

The man stared at him for a moment before nodding. He cleared their plates and herded Will back to the living room, he refreshed the fire and they both settled on the couch.

“I was a cop back in Louisiana, which I’ve told you about, well there was night, about a year and a bit into me time on the force, we got this call about a few disappearances…”

He’d never tried to tell the story before, the force wrote his panicked ramblings off as shock and marked it down as a gator or a pack of dogs or a madman. Hannibal listened quietly, his

face impassive, he didn't look dubious, he didn't really look like anything he just listened. It took Will a bit, he kept backtracking and over explaining and getting distracted.

He was scared, trying to prepare for the moment that Hannibal called him insane and left him behind like everyone else that decided he was too much. Finally he finished, trailed off before he got to the part where he changed himself, how he ripped the last person he'd fucked apart on his kitchen floor because he couldn't say it, couldn't drive the final nail himself.

"Did you ever see it again?"

"No, never went back, never heard any other reports of it."

"You must have been quite afraid."

Will grinned self deprecating and exhausted, "terrified, it was probably a bear or a dog or something right? Fear can make you see things." He tried to get up, an excuse on his tongue so he could escape, Hannibal pulled him back down and slid him closer, trapped Will against him.

"I am not patronizing you *vilkas,* I believe you."

"No you don't."

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Because it's insane, what I saw was insane and no normal person would believe me."

"I believe you."

He was so self assured, so calm in his acceptance, Will felt the urge to cry well in his throat.

"It changed me, that night…" Fuck it, final nail it was, "I'm not… human anymore."

He ducked his head, terrified and tired. It was quiet for a long time, he waited for Hannibal to leave.

"Will."

He didn't react.

"Will, I would like you to look at me please."

Will resisted for a moment before tilting his head up, his eyes stayed on Hannibal's collar.

"I believe you."

"Fuck you." He tried to jerk away, Hannibal pulled him into his lap and trapped him there despite Wills squirming.

"You feel you cannot believe me, cannot trust that I am being honest but I am, I do not believe you are insane."

“So you just believe me? No proof needed when I tell you I’m a fucking monster?”

Something flickered in his eyes, not guilt, but close, Will assessed him, Hannibal’s face was closed off again but he’d seen that momentary break.

“Hannibal. What aren’t you telling me.”

“What makes you think I am withholding anything.”

“ *Hannibal.”*

The man gave him a half smile and kissed him on the temple.

“Stubborn boy, did you know when you are aroused your eyes turn orange?”

“i - yes- wait how do you- what when?” he stuttered out, staring at the man, Hannibal just pulled him tight and ran a hand over his back.

“A few times now, but I saw the first night, you were so afraid, I will admit my imagination got the better of me but it seems I was not wrong.”

Will stared at him, uncomprehending. “The rougarou, that night… so you knew?”

“I guessed.”

He looked so smug, self assured, Will shoved back and out of the man’s lap.
“Oh fuck you.” He marched over and poured himself a drink. “Why the hell didn’t you bring it up.”

“I assumed you would react poorly if I confronted you.”

Will had to concede that he definitely would have. Still.

“Has anyone ever told you you’re a bastard.”

“A few.”

Will threw himself down on the couch with a huff.

“So when you were on the whole ‘the beauty in monsters’ thing…”

“I admit I was being somewhat facetious.”

“Ugh, so that’s it huh? You believe me, end of story.”

“Unless there’s anything else you wish to confess to.”

Will stared at him, then would have been a good time to mention the hunts, he was feeling a little unfair though.

“Well there is one thing… I think it would be better if I showed you.” His smile was all teeth.

It was three days later and they were in a bar, somewhere swanky but cheap. Hannibal hated it but it wasn’t about him at the moment, besides Will was still a little bitter so the man could suffer. They sat at a table near the bar, Will had a whiskey and Hannibal had an attempt at pretentious wine but judging by the purse of his lips it wasn’t up to par. The bar was busy, scent and noise bombarding Will’s senses, he focused the smell on Hannibal to center himself.

“How do you pick?” he asked idly, Will shrugged.

“I just know, now shush.” He shook his head to clear himself and let his sense spread, same as always, except this time the thing he wanted sat directly across from him and he had to fight himself away from the scent of rot and death and wine that made his mouth water. He could feel Hannibal watching him as he searched, calm and curious as he swirled his wine without drinking.

“-the look on her face, as if I’d date a woman” a voice caught his attention, snarky and sharp followed by a peal of cruel laughter, he caught her scent, rosé, expensive perfume and the sharp burn of coke.

Will grinned, “found one.”

“Now?”

“Now we wait, more wine?” he grinned at the way Hannibal frowned but was too amped and nervous to care. This would be it, either Hannibal was truthful and he would stay or he would run. Will had a feeling he wouldn’t be able to let the man go, would consume him in the end. Maybe he would return to Louisiana, he wasn’t sure if his creator was still there but he could uptake the mantle of the thing in the swamp, a change of pace.

The feeling in his chest wasn’t fear, he wouldn’t let it be fear, Hannibal was an intelligent psychopath, he wouldn’t fear Will, the question was if he could handle what he was.

It took a bit for Will to get an opening, he directed Hannibal to wait outside and stalked after his prey as she stumbled out of the club and around the corner. She had a baggy clutched in her hand, he grimaced, coke always made him twitchy.

He waited till she was further into the alley, till she was too focused on pouring a line to notice him as he snuck up behind her and knocked her unconscious. He froze at the sound of footsteps but calmed when he smelled Hannibal.

“She’s high, “ he observed as he came to stand beside Will’s crouched form.

“It’s fine, she’ll run most of it off.” He slung her over his shoulder and walked to the other end of the alley. Hannibal’s face was placid, curious, but his eyes burned in the low light.

They got to the car and on the road in short order with Will in the driver's seat, he considered picking a new spot, just in case, but he was confident Hannibal wouldn't sell him out. Besides, if things went wrong he wanted the home court advantage.

Hannibal stayed quiet most of the drive but his hand found its way onto Will's thigh and stayed there the whole time, it drove the burning hunger in Will's mind sharper and he tried to breath through the feeling, almost there.

They made it to the logging road around midnight and Will climbed out and stretched his back, it was cold but clear, a full moon, how fitting. Hannibal came to stand beside him, he had forgone his usual outfits for something nondescript, black jeans and a fleece coat, he wore gloves and boots on Will's request and Will was annoyed that he still looks so put together.

Will stared at the man for a few moments before brushing past him and opening the trunk. It was a little cold to strip at the car so he just threw his usual bag to Hannibal and pulled the woman from the trunk. He slung her dead weight over his shoulder and looked back at Hannibal.

"Last chance, you can wait in the car."

Hannibal stared at him a beat past, long enough for Will to fear rejection then the man took a step forward and pulled Will into a fierce kiss, he moaned at the contact pushing into it before breaking away.

"Okay, keep up."

The walk was as quiet as the car ride, Will let his senses fold out and walked in front, Hannibal's quiet footfalls behind him.

He went a bit deeper than normal, he was slightly paranoid, wanted to give himself an advantage where he could, he knew not to underestimate Hannibal, he was a prolific serial killer. He settled on a clearing almost two hours in and laid his burden down, he turned to Hannibal with a huff.

"I don't know how you want to do this, there will be a lot of running… you'll have to stay behind me." He saw the micro flash of anger.

"I assure you I am more than capable of protecting myself."

"I'm sure you are *Chesapeake,* I'm not trying to protect you, but I've never done this before. If I'm hunting and you get in front of me I could redirect and go after you, so *stay behind me* ."

Hannibal froze, his body stiffening like marble before deliberately relaxing, he nodded and Will huffed out a breath, "if you lose me just head north east until you hit the ravine, if you get really lost just stop and I'll come find you."

"I have a good sense of direction. Don't worry about me darling."

“Okay, i-okay.” He wasn’t sure what else to say but was stopped by a groan from behind him. He motioned for Hannibal to follow him out of the clearing leaving the woman to wake up. Will stripped, ignoring his audience as he felt himself start to expand, anticipation like a thrum under his skin. He shoved all his clothes into his bag and Hannibal took it from him.

“Ready?” he murmured, Hannibal hummed.

He took a deep breath and let the shift take over, it felt good to settle into his skin again, it had been too long with everything happening. He shook himself out and dared to look up at Hannibal, he was eye level with the man's chest in this form but could see his eyes clearly in the moonlight. He seemed to burn, more monster than man as he looked Will over.

“Will…” he breathed, Will growled at him, a warning to focus, and turned away. He could hear Hannibal follow him. The woman had climbed to her feet and was stumbling around in a circle. Will watched her for a moment, breathed the smell of fear and adrenaline before ducking out of the trees with a rumble.

The woman froze, her breath stuttering, the world held still for a moment then Will advanced, she broke free from her panic and ran.

Will spared a single thought to Hannibal before giving chase. She was fast, uncoordinated and loud but fast, Will tracked her easily but kept back, he wanted to run. He could hear the steady thump of Hannibal following after him, his smell disappearing into the wind as he kept behind his line of sight. Will ignored him, he was still himself in this form but he’d never hunted with someone else before, didn't trust himself when he was so close to his instincts.

The woman kept up a solid pace for well over twenty minutes before she began to flag and Will began to herd her to the endgame.

He opted for a smoother path down, he was distantly worried that Hannibal would fall on the steep parts of the ravine he favoured and he wasn’t over worried about losing his prey at this point. She was no longer keeping up much of a pace, the way she was sobbing under every breath and the uneven gate belied her exhaustion so Will gave her one last good push and watched her stumble down the hillside, crashing through bushes and over shale.

He watched for a minute, turning back to where Hannibal stood a few metres back, he was breathing hard but seemed calm but Will could smell the hunger, the want for violence on his skin. He gave the man a sharp snarling grin and began his descent down the hill. The woman had made it down the ravine and was running towards the water, it had frozen over on the edges and he watched her indecision of trusting the ice or staying on land.

The moment of pause cost her and Will took her down, he locked onto her upper arm and began dragging her away from the river edge as she screamed and thrashed. He found Hannibal again and he didn’t know if it was self destruction or some fucked up pack instinct that hand him dragging his prey in front of the man before he began to eat.

Hannibal watched him raptly as he ate, his breathing heavy over the sounds of the river and the woman dying between them. Will was in a trance of hunger and pride and fear and

satisfaction and by the time he was full he thrummed with all the energy under his skin. He shifted back, stepping over the remains of his meal bloody and naked and went right for the monster in front of him.

Hannibal watched his approach from where he sat and made no move to stop Will as he clamoured into his lap.

“Still seeing the beauty in the monsters?” he rumbled, his voice barely human. Hannibal didn’t respond, he simply dragged Will in close and crushed their mouths together. Will snarled into his mouth and twisted a fist into his shirt, he knew it was cold but didn’t care in the moment he tore himself away and tugged at the shirt.

“Off.” He demanded, Hannibal grinned and flipped him onto his back, hovering over him as he stripped out of his coat and shirt and crushed Will under his body weight. Instead of going for his mouth again Hannibal went for his neck and Will moaned at the bite of teeth and the heat of his tongue. He dug his nails into Hannibal’s ribs and held on as the man devoured him.

They fell into a mess of teeth and smeared blood and growled encouragement and Will found himself falling into the pleasure. Hannibal was relentless in his movements, violent as he carved a path into Will’s very core and made a place for himself. Will found himself on his back, scraping along the mulch and rocks as Hannibal pounded into him, his neck in Will’s face, he smelled like the woods and blood and death and Will felt his mouth water.

He wrapped his arms tight around Hannibal’s neck and pulled the man down, he settled heavy on top of him and continued to rock down into Will dragging a strangled whine from his throat. His first taste of skin and salt at his throat was ecstasy, Will rumbled an inhuman sound as he licked long stripes up his throat.

When he found his peak, stretched out on the forest floor he arched up with a groan and bit down on Hannibal’s shoulder till he tasted blood, the taste drove him higher till he was shaking under the weight of his pleasure. Hannibal groaned loud and long in his ear and his hips stuttered before stopping, settling like dead weight between his thighs.

They laid there for a while, loose-limbed and sated, Will smudged the rivulets of blood away from the wound and sucked them into his mouth. Hannibal hummed and levered himself up.

“You are stunning darling, a siren meant to lure me to my death.”

Will grinned from where he lay, bloody and sweaty.

“Can’t die yet, we’re just getting started.”

Hannibal smiled, “yes, yes we are.”

Chapter End Notes

Ta da! I'm bad at writing sex so if its a little underwhelming i'm sorry. So I'm marking this as done but there probably gonna be another chapter, I'm at a tossup between either
A. Hannibal's perspective of the story
B. epilogue thing of them being murdery nightmares together
let me know if you have an opinion, it may be a lil bit before its up who know's i have no schedule

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> Happy New Years! here is some violence and also sorta fluff?, I made a mush of both options cause i realized i forgot a whole ass thing i wanted to happen.
> Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What caused it?”

“A monster”

Hannibal was fascinated by Will Graham. That first meeting with the man, his dead client like a picked over meal between them, scruffy and abrasive and jaded, had piqued Hannibal's interest in the worst way. They had danced, Hannibal advancing and dear Will scuttling away like a hare under the paws of a wolf, the fascination growing with every dismissal and avoidance that fell from Will’s lips.

It came to a crescendo when Hannibal returned home early, two last minute cancellations leaving him a free afternoon, to find Will slumped over and asleep on his doorstep like a pagan offering. He’d been pliant and confused, loose as Hannibal directed him into the study and fed him before letting him sleep.

He felt his fascination grow into something obsessive as he watched the young man melt into sleep so trusting to a monster he couldn’t even see.

Then his panic and tears rife with self hatred so intense that Hannibal could almost taste it. Comfort felt strange on Hannibal's skin, the need to ensnare Will, to own him, but in equal turn the need to calm him, feed him. It was a disquieting feeling in a life so regimented but Hannibal welcomed the change.

And then, Will, beautiful pained Will, prowling and biting like a beast, taking where he had only ever abstained. Hannibal was *obsessed.* The feeling had only grown when Will pulled away from their kiss with a panicked sound and Hannibal caught sight of the fire in his eyes. An orange glow that was not a reflection, but born from within, something dangerous, something *new.*

Hannibal let him run, trapping him would only make him lash out, he waited instead, patient and unassuming until his little monster came back to him. In his waiting he read, he wasn’t one for fairy tales or falling into fantasy but he had enough sense to acknowledge some things in the world went beyond the reasonable.

Patience gave way for jealousy when Will's focus slipped firmly onto a lesser creature and Hannibal finally went searching when he felt Will was slipping too far.

The dance resumed, Will strayed closer but was still wary, Hannibal now understood why and pressed on regardless of the danger.

His next sounder was, he will admit, a jealous strike at the so-called Collector that stole so much of Will's mind away, an attempt at wooing Hannibal's monster away from a lesser darkness. He was entranced, bewitched, in love.

His patience was rewarded as Will crept closer, a stray in an alley wary of helping hands, he folded himself into Hannibal's life despite his own fears and Hannibal could not help but burn at the sight of Will on his arm surrounded by his dinner guests, the feeling of him bound and shaking is pleasure. Now he only needed the truth from Will's own lips and he could have him fully.

When he knew Will, knew him fully, he would know how much he would need to condition the man into accepting Hannibal's own bloody secret.

When Will did not show up for dinner, did not answer his phone, Hannibal was annoyed, felt slighted at the uncharacteristic rudeness. When he did not hear from him well into the night Hannibal felt the tendrils of worry, an emotion he felt rarely and did not enjoy in the slightest, he tried to hold onto his ire and stopped calling the man as to not seem… desperate.

He did not sleep, he cleaned his kitchen, planned the week's menu, redid his dining room centrepiece and showered before settling in his study around four to organize client notes. He carefully ordered and ignored his emotions, not allowing the worry and borderline fear to spill over into his conscious mind.

When Will called just after five he could not stop himself from heading to the door the moment he learned he was in the hospital, fear gave way to anger, rage, knowing Will had been wounded and he didn't know, couldn't help. Seeing him wrapped and woozy had only spiked the anger higher and he forced on a calm mask until he could get Will home and settled and asleep.

Caring for him helped, knowing he was guarded and healing, but he could not forgive the actions of a lesser predator, there would be retribution when the time came.

He would concede the Collector finally gave him the chance he needed, Will finally spilling his secret telling him the truth, regrettably dragging Hannibal's own omission out in the process. It was worth it, to have the truth, to know his monster fully.

The invitation to hunt had been surprising, he had known Will was something monstrous, the thought that he was not just a monster but a predator just like him was something Hannibal could not have dreamed. Will wanted to show him, to scare him away maybe but Hannibal was not one to turn down such delicious opportunities.

Will on a hunt was something otherworldly, sat in a booth in a less than ideal restaurant Hannibal watched as he seemed to slide out of his body perusing through the other patrons before presumably locking onto someone. He had called Hannibal that morning, clipped and hiding nerves as he gave him the address and told him to dress for hiking.

Hannibal stayed quiet, observant as they traveled well out of the city and hiked into the middle of nowhere with Will's chosen hunt draped over his shoulder like she weighed nothing at all.

The night was bright and Hannibal felt the rush of a kill under his skin, the urge to consume, to hunt. This was Will's hunt though and he conceded the lead to the other man.

Will seemed unsure for a moment, nervous where he had been only confident and calm.

"I don't know how you want to do this, there will be a lot of running… you'll have to stay behind me." Hannibal felt a flash of annoyance, the image of Will protecting him from that coked out scrap of a woman.

"I assure you I am more than capable of protecting myself." He couldn't help but sneer, Will's face twisted into something condescending, his eyes already glowing like fire.

"I'm sure you are *Chesapeake,* I'm not trying to protect you, but I've never done this before. If I'm hunting and you get in front of me I could redirect and go after you, so *stay behind me* ."

Hannibal froze on instinct, the need to lash out warring with need to take Will here and now because his darling, dangerous creature *already knew.*

He conceded for the moment, arousal and violence clamouring in his mind.

When Will changed everything went quiet for a perfect moment. He was almost five feet tall on all fours and Hannibal realized he would not win in a fight with Will in this form, he was black as night and adorned in stiff hair and raven feathers, a deity, a demon, *everything.*

The hunt was short lived, Hannibal would have to provide him someone that could run longer than twenty minutes, perhaps a birthday present.

He kept pace with the massive beast and hung back when Will finally cornered his kill, he felt an emotion unknown and overwhelming in his chest as his beautiful monster dragged his screaming prize right to Hannibal's feet and began to eat it alive. He kept himself still with every shred of will he possessed, distantly aware Will may be lost inside his mind.

The way he ate was something Hannibal would dream of, gluttonous and violent, ripping flesh from bone and pulling his prey's heart from its chest before it had taken its final breath.

Having Will under him, bloody and cast in moonlight while Hannibal took his fill of his skin and sound tore his mind apart and rebuilt it around the man, the monster writhing under him in the blood soaked dirt.

They lay in the afterglow for only a moment before the chill and the feeling of blood drying on his skin became too much and he rose to dress. Hannibal watched as Will pulled a bag and a knife from his pack instead of dressing and began stripping what was left of the meat from the carcass that lay beside them. He moved to help him and got a snarling growl and a snap of teeth in response, recognizing the animal still dancing under Will's skin he moved away to find the woman's lost shoe and cover her tracks in the soft mud near the river.

He watched as Will splashed into the half frozen river to rinse himself, apparently unbothered by the cold. When he was dressed and had packed away his remains did he allow Hannibal near him again. His expression was guarded, when he didn't lash out Hannibal moved in close and kissed him on the temple, smelling the blood and river water on his damp skin.

"Beautiful…" he murmured before directing Will back towards the ravine.

They walked in silence for a while, Will shivering now that his adrenaline had faded.

"When did you realize."

Will looked at him over his shoulder, his eyes still glowing faintly. "Know what?"

"You know I am the Chesapeake Ripper, when did you find out."

Will shrugged and adjusted his pack, Hannibal wanted to take it from him but was wary of setting him off again.

"I know what people taste like, knew what you were feeding me from the start, didn't put two and two together until the dinner party," he was frowning at the ground.

"Would you have turned me in?" He doubted it now but was still curious. Will shook his head.

"When I took this job I was told my only job was to catch the Ripper, that didn't last long and soon I was hunting every crazy that slid across my desk, I realized the Ripper was something rare, refined, something that didn't deserve a cage, when I realized it was you I knew I could never turn in the one person that might understand."

He continued to walk as though he had not ripped the floor out from under Hannibal and sucked in a startled breath when Hannibal pinned him to a tree and crushed their lips together in a bruising kiss. Desire welled like blood to a cut and Hannibal yearned to have him again, in the moonlight and the dirt and the wild, Will grinned at him between kisses and pushed him away.

"As much as I appreciate this I am freezing and would much rather continue in a bed, besides we've only got an hour before dawn and we need to be off the logging road by then." He gave Hannibal another kiss before trudging ahead.

They made it back to Wolf Trap by six and Hannibal watched as Will let the dogs out before disappearing into the shed with his bag; he returned a few moments later and handed Hannibal a frozen bag of unidentified meat.

“From the last one, make some breakfast?” His grin was mischievous and playful and Hannibal took the cool package before dragging Will into another kiss.

“Of course, *vilkas.”*

He joined Will in a cramped but pleasant shower before dressing in clean clothes and moving into the kitchen. He had stocked it properly while Will was injured and settled into a familiar routine of whipping up a meal while Will watched from the table.

Bacon would have been preferred, curing time to make something worthy from the first meat Will had offered him but he settled on simple sausage and eggs and savored the first knowing meal he could share with the man.

They moved to the living room once the meal was finished then quickly the bedroom when Hannibal realized Will had been entirely truthful about wanting to continue.

Laid out on Will’s scratchy wool comforter while the man rode him glowing in the morning light with eyes burning like embers Hannibal felt reborn. Will fell asleep almost immediately after and Hannibal could do nothing but watch him, absorb his every breath and twitch, the smell of his skin and the sound of his heart beating in his chest.

All too soon the world came calling and they had to return to work. Will drove Hannibal back to Baltimore and left him with a kiss and a promise of tomorrow before driving off to a never ending hunt for the next great killer.

Hannibal never saw himself as one for domesticity but with Will he couldn’t help but yearn for it, to have the man come home to him at the end of the day and to wake with him in the morning. They had dinners and Will slept over often, Hannibal showered him with gifts and luxuries and Will squirmed from the attention.

The Collector case made great waves in Baltimore and Hannibal tried to fight the jealousy as Will was once again dragged away to prepare for the trial, he slept over less, and when he did it was overshadowed by an exhaustion that seemed to worsen the closer they got.

When one night ended with many missed calls after Will fell asleep in his car at the BAU Hannibal decided it was quite enough.

Three days before his trial was to start Jeremiah Oxendale went missing from his holding cell at some point early in the morning. The cameras had stopped for approximately three minutes and the guards on duty were found dead with broken necks.

Hannibal waited patiently, his gift stored away in the basement as the FBI and police scattered and searched. He knew he had to be careful, if he stole Will away immediately there would be questions. A few days passed and the chaos dulled to an anxious buzz and Hannibal convinced Will he would not be missed for a few days, besides, it was his birthday.

He had booked them a cabin, somewhere remote, off the grid and by the ocean. The drive took a few hours and he told Will he couldn't look in the trunk. They had a late lunch and Hannibal sent Will to the beach for a few hours so he could prepare.

They were hours from any form of civilization, Hannibal had prepared for weeks, a perfect gift for his darling monster. Will was suspicious at dinner, he tried to ask but Hannibal gave nothing away. When he went to change into appropriate clothing something in Will shifted, curious and hungry.

"Hannibal…"

"Will"

"What did you do." he sounded wary but Hannibal could see the fire in his eyes.

"You limit yourself *vilkas* you hunt as a beast but within the bounds of your humanity, I want to show you how much more you could have." Will followed him out of the cabin and looked around in confusion.

"I don't know what that means."

"While you were at the beach I released Mr.Oxendale into the woods, he will have made it quite far at this point I believe."

Will watched him for a moment, his eyes shifting between green and orange as he processed, "you let him out."

"I took him, yes, and I brought him here so you may feel a true hunt."

The orange was dominant now and Will's skin seemed to shift, "it will take quite a while, he is smart he will be well away from here by now."

"I am counting on it." Hannibal smiled as Will's control seemed to slip and he began to shrug out of his clothes. "I will follow behind you, we will make camp once you catch him." Will glanced at the hiking pack at his feet but seemed too far gone to reply. Hannibal stepped back as he began to shift fully and marvelled at seeing Will once again in his true skin.

The beast took a moment to sniff around Hannibal, licking at his hand before turning away, he tracked along the trunk of the car and then trailed into the woods to follow his prey.

The hunt was long, Hannibal trekking behind as Will weaved through the woods tracking scents, the trail was quite obvious, hopped up on adrenaline and a mild hallucinogenic Jeremiah made no effort to cover his tracks.

They walked well into the night, Will disappearing ahead for long stretches of time whenever he caught a good trail. Hannibal kept a steady pace on his tail and enjoyed the thrill of the build up the thrummed in his veins.

It was nearing dawn when Will completely froze, he'd been back in Hannibal's sights so he too stopped and listened to the quiet woods around him. Will crouched low and slid through

the bushes silently and Hannibal lowered his pack to the ground to follow after him, he'd just slipped in close when he heard a cry of fear and Jeremiah came darting out of the bush at a dead run, Will on his heels.

The man was filthy and frenzied as he darted away from the beast and began to sprint through the woods, Hannibal followed after.

Even after months incarcerated Jeremiah was strong, he kept a good pace and a good lead as he dashed through the woods. Will snarled and snapped on his heels, his eyes glowing in the early morning air.

They broke free from the trees onto a thin stretch of rocky beach and Hannibal slowed to watch as Will drove his prey out into the open and began to close in on him.

Will caught him just before he reached the water and dragged him down to the rocky sand. The fight dragged out for a few moments, but Will could not be beat as he tore and ravaged and his prize, his gift, went down with a final wet cry and Will was upon him in a moment.

Hannibal watched as blood spilled onto the sand as Will ate and savoured the dying cries of a lesser beast like a fine wine.

When he had his fill he tracked back to where he left his bag and returned to the beach to set up a camp. He knew to leave Will to his feast, his mind more animal than man did not take kindly to any encroaching on his kill.

Hannibal had little interest in camping, it was not an activity that held any benefit in his mind but here, so far from anything he usually enjoyed, watching the rising sun glinting off his lovely monster as he feasted among the receding tide, this wild feeling was something he would savour.

By the time Will had ate his fill and washed away the blood Hannibal had erected a small tent and built a fire, water put to warm for making coffee as Will stalked over still in his fur.

Hannibal stilled where he crouched by the fire and watched as Will circled him slowly, sniffing at his back and face. He did not fear him, but stayed still nonetheless, aware of who was the stronger predator in that moment, eventually Will finished whatever he was doing and pulled back, he seemed to stretch and melt until he was back in his human skin.

He pulled Hannibal into a kiss the moment he could and gave Hannibal barely a moment to take the boiling water from the fire before dragging him into the tent.

With his monster so close to the surface Will was a violent lover, all teeth and dominance and bloody lines raked over every inch of skin, his eyes gleamed bright in the cool morning air as he held Hannibal closer, deeper. They fell apart together in a litany of groaning words before laying down in a heap to catch their breath.

"Thank you…" Will murmured in his ear after an eternity of sharing only breathes and gentle caresses.

“Of course, happy birthday dear Will.”

Eventually they reemerged and Hannibal ate a simple breakfast while Will drank his coffee and they both stepped into the sea to rise off before they slipped back into the tent to sleep.

When they awoke in the late afternoon Will allowed Hannibal to strip the remains of meat from his kill, a gesture he could feel the importance of, before they buried the bones in the woods and began their journey back to the cabin.

The rest of the trip was spent peacefully, on the beach or in bed as Hannibal carved himself deeper into Will’s skin until they were but one beast, a chimera of violence and lust and hedonistic passion. They lay together on the final morning, nude and intertwined in the dawning light and Hannibal knew this was all he could need, he could dream of, and he would cling to it, consume it until there was nothing left of either of them.

Chapter End Notes

So i waited way too long between writing this so i had to reread the story to get the timeline right but if anything is glaringly different please tell me.
I have started writing a story thats a great gatsby mash up and im real stoked about it so please go look at it if you want some Hannibal thats also 1920s gangsters (who wouldn't come on now)
thank you so much for reading this is the longest thing ive ever written and im real proud of it
until next time friends :)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!